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A History of Ancient Israel: From the Patriarchs Through the Romans

COURSE GUIDE



Professor Eric H. Cline
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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Course Syllabus

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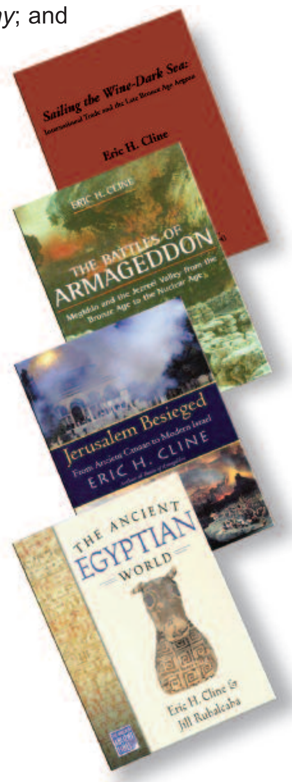
Photo courtesy of Eric H. Cline

About Your Professor

Eric H. Cline

Dr. Eric H. Cline, a former Fulbright scholar, is chair of the Department of Classical and Semitic Languages and Literatures at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where he holds a joint appointment as an associate professor in both the Classics/Semitics Department and the Anthropology Department.

A prolific researcher, Dr. Cline is the author or editor of seven books and has more than seventy articles and book reviews to his credit. His books include *The Battles of Armageddon: Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley from the Bronze Age to the Nuclear Age,* which received the 2001 Biblical Archaeology Society (BAS) Publication Award for Best Popular Book on Archaeology; *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel; Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: International Trade and the Late Bronze Age Aegean; Amenhotep III: Perspectives on His Reign (coeditor); The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium BC; Thutmose III: A New Biography*; and a book for young adults entitled *The Ancient Egyptian World (*coauthor with Jill Rubalcaba).



Professor Cline received the Morton Bender Award for Teaching at The George Washington University in 2004 and the Archaeological Institute of America's National Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award for 2005. He currently teaches a wide variety of courses, including Troy and the Trojan War, History of Ancient Greece, History of Rome, and Art and Archaeology of the Aegean Bronze Age.

Professor Cline has lectured at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles. His research has been featured in the *Washington Post,* the *New York Times, US News & World Report,* the *London Daily Telegraph,* the *London Mirror,* and many other publications around the world.

In addition, Professor Cline has been featured on numerous radio and television broadcasts, such as the BBC World Services, National Public Radio, the Discovery Channel, the National Geographic Channel, and the History Channel.

Dr. Cline is married, with two children, two cats, and varying numbers of fish.



Crossing the Red Sea
Bartolo di Fredi, 1367 fresco
(ca. 1330–1410)

Introduction

Israel conjures up myriad associations for peoples of all cultures and religious backgrounds. Inextricably associated with the world's three most prominent religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), Israel is steeped in history and conflict, much of which is known through the tales of biblical figures such as Moses, David, Solomon, and, of course, Jesus Christ.

But how much of the Bible can be relied upon as accurate history? And how much of the biblical record can be verified through archaeology? Esteemed professor, researcher, and author Eric H. Cline of The George Washington University addresses these and other questions in this fascinating series of lectures.

A History of Ancient Israel follows the course of Israel's history from Abraham and the Patriarchs through the Exodus, Exile, and two great Jewish rebellions, encompassing a rich history that increases one's understanding of Israel's place in the world today. In addition to this storied region's tumultuous past, Professor Cline delves into such compelling digressions as lectures on the Ark of the Covenant, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and controversy surrounding the fabled mass suicide at Masada.

Lecture 1: Abraham and the Patriarchs

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 1: "The Setting" and chapter 2: "The Question of Origins") and Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 1: "The Patriarchal Age: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob").

The history of ancient Israel, as we currently know and understand it, is based on the stories found in the Hebrew Bible, combined with the discoveries generated by modern-day archaeologists. As a result, we have an interesting set of data that occasionally (some would say frequently) contradicts itself, for the archaeological discoveries do not always square with the biblical account. On the other hand, there is a lot of information in the Bible that can be correlated with independent extra-biblical (outside the Bible) sources. In the following course, we will be concerned with much of this data, which has been the subject of intensive study and innumerable debates by scholars.

The Holy Land

The Holy Land consisted primarily of ancient Israel and Judah, which is essentially the region of modern Israel today, with extensions into modern Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. Before the Israelites arrived in the area, it was known as the land of Canaan, which comes from the Egyptian name for the region. This region found itself caught between great empires for most of its history, which is one reason why there have been so many conflicts fought here in the past four millennia. To the north were the Hittites, located in what is now modern Turkey, as well as the Assyrians and the Babylonians in ancient Mesopotamia, located in modern-day Iraq and northern Syria. To the south were the Egyptians. Later the Persians, followed by the Greeks and then the Romans, invaded the region and took over not only the Holy Land but the entire ancient Near East one after the other.

The lands of Israel and Judah themselves were always bordered by the Mediterranean Sea on the west, the Jordan River and the desert on the east, the Negev and Sinai deserts on the south, and mountainous country to the north. Within the region are found several habitation zones: the coastal plains, the foothills, known as the Shephelah, the central Hill country (where cities such as Jerusalem were located), the Rift Valley, and the Eastern Hills.

Early History

The story of ancient Israel and Judah, as told in the Hebrew Bible, is familiar to most people, even if many only remember bits and pieces from their childhood—the story of the creation of the world, the great flood that Noah survived by building an ark, the journeys of Abraham and his father around



Mesopotamia and into Canaan, the trials and tribulations of the Hebrews in Egypt, followed by Moses delivering them from slavery during the Exodus, the Ten Plagues and forty years of wandering, and eventually the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites led by Joshua.

If we begin at the beginning, we move rapidly from the Garden of Eden, which was probably (but not certainly located) somewhere in Mesopotamia, to the story of the great flood, which only Noah and his family survived. Because none of these topics are strictly concerned with the history of ancient Israel itself, we can safely skip over them here. Suffice it to say, though, that there are parallels to many of these stories found in the literature of ancient Mesopotamia and Canaan, leading to interesting speculations on the part of biblical scholars and ancient historians about the extent of external influences upon the biblical traditions. Included in here are such things as whether one can suggest that the Tower of Babel was in fact a memory of a ziggurat—a religious edifice that once reached to the heavens in the city of Babylon—and whether (or how) Noah's flood may be related to a very similar flood described in the Mesopotamian saga entitled the *Epic of Gilgamesh.*

Abraham and the Patriarchs

Once we get to the time of Abraham, we are on more firm ground, but even here there are potential problems. The biblical account tells us that Abraham's father lived in "Ur of the Chaldees," which many believe is located in Mesopotamia—modern-day Iraq. Sir Leonard Woolley excavated a site called Ur in the 1920s, and even though this is usually referred to as Abraham's Ur, it is not at all clear whether it actually is or not. Similarly, we are then told that Abraham's father moved from Ur to the city of Haran, which is usually considered to be located in southeastern Turkey, but there is no real proof for that location either. Finally, according to the biblical account, Abraham himself moved from Haran down to Canaan, then to the Negev and

then to Egypt, only to return to Canaan and settle down in Hebron. Unfortunately, there are no inscriptions anywhere in the ancient Near East mentioning Abraham, apart from the Hebrew Bible, nor are there yet any archaeological attestations for his existence, nor for the other Patriarchs (Isaac and Jacob). That does not mean that they did not exist; it simply means that we have no extra-biblical evidence yet available to use as proof.



Abraham and the Three Angels
by Domenico Fontebasso, 1707–69
Abraham is promised the birth of a son (Isaac) by three angels.

As a result, there have been numerous suggestions made by archaeologists, ancient historians, and biblical scholars regarding Abraham and the Patriarchs, particularly concerning when they might have lived. One possibility is that that these biblical figures date to the early years of the Middle Bronze Age, during the twentieth or nineteenth centuries BCE, which was a time of great migrations around the ancient Near East. They may also date to a little bit later in the Middle Bronze Age, perhaps into the seventeenth or even the sixteenth centuries BCE, which fits a bit better with some of the chronologies and genealogies given in the Bible. However, it has also recently been suggested that Abraham and the Patriarchs date to the Early Iron Age, that is, the early years of the first millennium, and that the writers of the Hebrew Bible simply placed them more than a thousand years earlier to concoct a made-up history of ancient Israel. And it has also been suggested that there were no Patriarchs at all, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never existed and that they were simply made up to illustrate particular stories and were part of an invented history.

How does one choose between these hypotheses? The answer is that we cannot, at least at the present time, which is hardly satisfactory but is in fact the current state of affairs.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What evidence is there for external influences on biblical traditions?
2. What are the various theories regarding the time that Abraham and the Patriarchs might have lived?

Suggested Reading

Miller, J. Maxwell, and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986.

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. 2nd rev. ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

Other Books of Interest

Finkelstein, Israel, and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.

Geoghegan, Jeffrey C., and Michael M. Homan. *The Bible for Dummies*. New York: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2003.

Mazar, Amihai. *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000–586 BCE*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Rast, Walter E. *Through the Ages in Palestinian Archaeology: An Introductory Handbook*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992.

Websites to Visit

1. W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (AIAR) in Jerusalem is the oldest American research center for ancient Near Eastern studies in the Middle East — www.aiar.org/index.html
2. Biblical Studies (United Kingdom) website provides an essay entitled "Archaeological Data and the Dating of the Patriarchs" from A.R. Millard and D.J. Wiseman's (eds.) *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (1980) — www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/epn_3_bimson.html
3. Mechon Mamre organization website features a Hebrew-to-English version of the Jewish Publication Society's 1917 edition of the Hebrew Bible — www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/et0.htm

Lecture 2: The Exodus and Egypt

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 2: "The Question of Origins") and Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 2: "Israel in Egypt: The Egyptian Sojourn and the Exodus").

The story of the Exodus is filled with problems and questions similar to some of those concerning the Patriarchs. Even though the history and archaeology of Egypt is known in a great deal of detail, and has been for decades now, we are still at a loss for how to fit the story of the Exodus into Egyptian history, for it is never mentioned in Egyptian records. This is perhaps not surprising, for the Egyptians rarely mention defeats. But still one does wonder.

In and Out of Egypt

Before we get to the Exodus, however, we have to get the Hebrews down into Egypt in the first place. This is readily done via a Bible story from the Book of Genesis known to most modern schoolchildren—the story of Joseph. Joseph was one of Jacob's twelve children—it is these twelve who are traditionally seen as the ancestors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. However, Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and eventually sold him into slavery without Jacob's knowledge. Although he began alone and in prison in Egypt, Joseph eventually came to the Pharaoh's notice by successfully interpreting dreams. Ultimately, Joseph was powerful enough, serving as Vizier to the Pharaoh, that he was able to help his father and brothers when they and their families migrated to Egypt during a time of famine.

It is thought by ancient historians, biblical scholars, and archaeologists that the most likely time for this migration to have taken place was during the so-called Hyksos period, when Egypt was ruled by foreigners who invaded from the region of Canaan during the years 1720–1550 BCE. These foreigners, called the Hyksos by later Egyptians, were almost certainly not the Hebrews, but it does represent the one time during the entire second millennium BCE that a foreigner like Joseph could have risen to a position of high power within the Egyptian government. This is, of course, assuming that the biblical story can be taken at face value, which is itself debated by scholars.

Eventually, however, the Hebrews in Egypt were reduced to slavery. It is not clear exactly when this took place; we are only told, in the biblical account, that a Pharaoh came to the throne who "knew not Joseph." This may well have been at the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty, in approximately 1550 BCE or soon thereafter, when the Egyptians expelled the Hyksos, chasing them all the way back up into Canaan. (There are those who have attempted to link the Exodus with this expulsion of the Hyksos, but

the chronology doesn't quite work.) In any event, it is at this point that the biblical account of Moses takes up the tale and we learn of the young man who is destined to lead the Hebrews out of bondage and out of Egypt.

A Miraculous Escape

The biblical story of Moses and the Exodus is familiar to most people in the world today, even if most of them think that Moses looked like Charlton Heston. The tale of Moses beseeching the Pharaoh to "let my people go" has become famous, as have the Ten Plagues that were sent, one after the other, to help persuade Pharaoh that letting the Hebrews go was a good idea. These plagues included blood, frogs, lice, flies, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the slaying of the firstborn, as repeated during the Passover ceremony each year by observant Jews still today. Unfortunately, try as they might, archaeologists have been unable to document any instance of such a set of plagues recorded in Egyptian texts, nor have amateur sleuths fared any better, despite valiant attempts and numerous documentaries aired repeatedly on cable television channels.

After the Hebrews eventually left Egypt, having crossed the Red (actually, the Reed) Sea with better success than Pharaoh and his army, they spent the next forty years wandering in the desert before being able to enter the "land of milk and honey"—Canaan. It was during this period that Moses climbed Mt. Sinai—whose exact location is still debated today—and received the Ten Commandments, which are unique in history. (The nearest similar ancient "laws" that we have are in something called the "Negative Confession" from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom period, but even these are not identical.)

One of the primary questions that we need to ask in connection with this story is this: Which route did Moses and the Hebrews follow during their journey of forty years? Did they go on a northern route, up near the coast? Did they go on a middle route across the Sinai, or did they go far down south? These routes are all possible, and yet the northern route is most likely out of the picture, because the Egyptians had a series of forts across this route. The middle



A chromolithograph of Moses, with the Ten Commandments, angered over the corruption of the Jews as Aaron looks on, ca. 1885

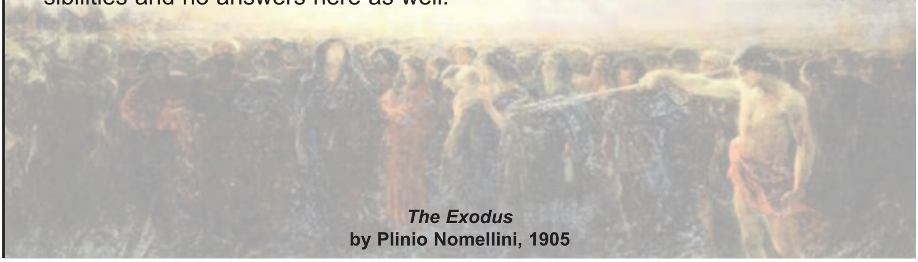


route is probably out too, going across the middle of the Sinai, because it is in the middle of the desert. It's really only the very southern route, going almost all the way to Sharm El Sheikh, which makes the most sense for where the Hebrews, or Israelites, could have been for forty years. Therefore, most archaeologists and ancient historians assume that Moses and the Hebrews wandered around the very southern part of the Sinai for much of these forty years.

It was only after Moses and most of the people from his generation had died that the Hebrews, now renamed the Israelites, were finally allowed to enter the land of Canaan. Even then they had to take it by force, with Joshua leading them into battle. And still the miracles continued, for it is in this context that we learn of the capture of Jericho, whose walls came tumbling down when the Israelites blew their horns, or so the Bible says.

Holes in the Desert

How much of this biblical story can be believed, and how much has been corroborated by archaeology or other sources? In brief, there is the biblical narrative and little else. It may be a matter of faith to believe that the Exodus and everything else took place as the Bible describes it. On the other hand, even if the Israelites camped in the desert for forty years, little can be expected to be found in the desert through archaeology. For example, if they were camping, they would have used tents with post holes, rather than permanent structures. An archaeologist working today is not going to be able to find houses and walls and remains of permanent structures belonging to these migrating Israelites, but only holes in the ground in which the tent pegs had once been placed, and those are almost impossible to find. But again, absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence. The jury is still out on whether, and how, the Exodus took place. And if it did, we still have the question of when it would have taken place, for there are numerous possibilities and no answers here as well.



The Exodus
by Plinio Nomellini, 1905

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why is it difficult to find archaeological proof of the Hebrews' supposed forty-year stay in the desert?
2. What is the "Negative Confession"?

Suggested Reading

Miller, J. Maxwell, and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986.

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. 2nd rev. ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

Other Books of Interest

Dever, William G. *What Did the Biblical Writers Know & When Did They Know It?: What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.

Feiler, Bruce S. *Walking the Bible: A Journey by Land Through the Five Books of Moses.* New York: William Morrow, 2001.

Finkelstein, Israel, and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.

Marcus, Amy D. *The View from Nebo: How Archaeology Is Rewriting the Bible and Reshaping the Middle East.* Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 2000.

Websites to Visit

1. *Chabad* magazine website features dozens of articles from scholarly and nonscholarly sources on the Exodus — www.chabad.org/search/keyword.asp?kid=299
2. Professor Emmanuel Anati is founder and executive director of the Centro Camuno di Studi Prehistorici in Capo di Ponte, Italy, and a professor ordinarius (ret.) of palaeoethnology at the University of Lecce, Italy; his book *The Riddle of Mount Sinai: Archaeological Discoveries at Har Karkom* claims he has found the true site of Mount Sinai — www.harkarkom.com
3. "How Reliable Is Exodus?" by Allen Millard (appeared in the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July-August, 2000) — www.fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Documents/how_reliable_is_exodus.htm

Lecture 3: The Conquest of Canaan: Israelites, Philistines, and Phoenicians

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 3: "Before Any King Ruled in Israel" and chapter 4: "The Early Israelite Monarchy") and Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 3: "The Settlement in Canaan: The Period of the Judges").

The first time that "Israel" is mentioned outside the Bible is in the Merneptah stele, which was inscribed during the fifth year of Pharaoh Merneptah of Egypt, about 1207 BCE. In this inscription, Merneptah says that "Israel has been laid waste." In this same year, in another set of inscriptions, Merneptah mentions the invasion of the Sea Peoples, who conquered most of the countries of the Mediterranean at this time. The Mycenaeans and Minoans of Greece were conquered by them. The Hittites of Turkey were conquered by them. Even Cyprus was conquered, as were the peoples of Canaan. It was only the Egyptians under Merneptah, and then his successor Ramses III, who were able to stand up to the Sea Peoples.

The Invasion of the Sea Peoples

Did the invasion of the Sea Peoples allow the Israelites to eventually take over the land of Canaan? The Exodus took place (most likely) by 1250 BCE at the absolute latest, and may, in fact, have been a process that took place over a period of two hundred years. If the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years, and then conquered the land of Canaan by 1207 (the time of Merneptah's inscription), this would coincide with the same approximate time that the Sea Peoples took over Canaan.

The Sea Peoples pillaged and then departed the region (until they were later resettled in the area by the Egyptians). Some think the Sea Peoples left the Canaanite city-states in smoking ruins, allowing the Israelites to take over territory that they would not otherwise have been able to conquer. This would contradict the biblical story of Joshua's conquest, which credits Joshua and the Israelites for conquering the region—but then again,



A relief sculpture at Medinet Habu in Egypt depicts Philistines (Peleset) dressed in their feathered headgear, captured during a raid against Ramses III in 1186 BCE.

does it? The biblical accounts and the available archaeological evidence present enough contradictions between them that any number of suggestions and solutions are possible.

Regardless of how the Israelite conquest of Canaan may have taken place, when the Israelites did finally end up in Canaan, they came into contact with the Phoenicians and the Philistines.

The Phoenicians

The land of Phoenicia was located almost exactly where Lebanon is today. Their main cities were Tyre and Sidon, as well as Beirut and Byblos; all of these cities are still inhabited today.

The Phoenicians were remarkable merchants and traders. They sailed to Crete and Greece, to Italy and Sicily, to North Africa, and even founded the city of Carthage. They also sailed as far as Spain, and to Sardinia and areas in between. The word Phoenician comes from an ancient word that means "purple," and their name implies that they were merchants of purple dye, as were the Canaanites before them. However, the main contribution of the Phoenicians is undoubtedly the invention of the alphabet, which was eventually adopted and spread by the Greeks and Romans throughout Europe.

The tenth century is the golden age of Phoenician wealth and power, and it was during this period that the Phoenicians interacted with the Israelites and



The Phoenician alphabet was based on the principle that one sign represents one spoken sound. Below each sign is shown its sound value, name, and meaning. The diagram reads from right to left.

Source: Craig, James, Irene Korol Scala, and William Bevington. *Designing with Type.* 5th ed. New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2006.

the earliest kings of Israel down to the time of David and Solomon, as we shall soon see.

The Philistines

The history of the Philistines is known mostly from the Bible, Egyptian records, and archaeological finds. They are first mentioned in the Egyptian inscriptions concerned with the Sea Peoples and are known as the Peleset. According to these Egyptian sources, at the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the twelfth centuries BCE, the Peleset were defeated by the Egyptians and settled in Philistia in the southern part of Canaan. They renamed the land Palashtu, from which the name Palestine eventually came.

There were five major cities of the Philistines, as we are told in the Bible—Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath. All of these have now been found and excavated by archaeologists; they are all located in the coastal plain or in the nearby foothills. In addition, there were smaller sites as well, including Tell Qasile, located in modern Tel Aviv, for example.

Interactions between the Israelites and the Phoenicians and the Philistines were not always friendly. In fact, the first king of Israel, Saul, was killed in a battle against the Philistines.

Saul vs. the Philistines

Saul believed that his fledgling kingdom needed to expand. However, the Philistines saw the expansion of the Israelites as a very bad idea and possibly detrimental to their existence. Thus, for much of Saul's reign, there were ongoing battles between the Israelites and the Philistines—during what was probably the eleventh or the tenth centuries BCE.

Saul's final battle against the Philistines took place in the Jezreel Valley, in the north of Israel, near Megiddo, the biblical Armageddon. The Philistines considered this area crucial, and they wanted to encircle and capture the heart of Saul's kingdom.



Modern political boundaries in Northern Israel showing the location of Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley

The Philistines already held Beth-shan to the east of the Jezreel Valley and the Coastal Plain to the west. If they won the Jezreel Valley, they would cut Saul's kingdom into two parts and separate the Israelites in Galilee and the Jezreel Valley from the rest of the Israelite tribes.

Saul, therefore, had no choice but to fight the Philistines for control of the valley. The story of the battle is told in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. There are as yet no contemporary extra-biblical sources to confirm these accounts, but in Saul's case, at least, the story is repeated with some embellishment about a thousand years later by Josephus, the Jewish general turned Roman historian, in his book *The Antiquities of the Jews*.

The Valley of Jezreel was extremely important in antiquity. The Via Maris, the Way of the Sea, went right through the valley. Megiddo is in the middle of the valley. The Jordan River is to the east and the Mediterranean Sea is to the west. Anybody who wanted to invade this area had to go through the Jezreel Valley, so there have been no fewer than thirty-four battles fought in the last four thousand years in this single valley. It is one of the bloodiest places on earth. It is not surprising that the author of the Book of Revelation placed one of the final battles between good and evil at Megiddo, near where Saul fought his last battle.

During this battle, Saul was killed, along with his son Jonathan and several other sons. The Philistines won the battle. David became king upon the death of Saul, whose head was cut off and whose body was hung up on the wall at Beth-shan. And with that, the first era of the Israelite monarchy came to an end. David assumed the throne, and there followed the period referred to as the United Monarchy, the golden age of Israel.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What was the main contribution of the Phoenicians?
2. Why did the Philistines consider the Jezreel Valley to be such a crucial area to control?

Suggested Reading

Miller, J. Maxwell, and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986.

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. 2nd rev. ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

Other Books of Interest

Cline, Eric H. *The Battles of Armageddon: Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley from the Bronze Age to the Nuclear Age*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Websites to Visit

1. The Megiddo Expedition operates under the auspices of Tel Aviv University and is directed by Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin (Tel Aviv University), with Eric Cline (The George Washington University) serving as associate director — www.tau.ac.il/humanities/archaeology/megiddo/index.html
2. The Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project is a long-term investigation aimed at studying the archaeology and history of one of the most important sites in Israel, the Philistine city of Gath; this project is directed by Professor Aren M. Maeir, an archaeologist from Bar Ilan University of Ramat-Gan, Israel — www.faculty.biu.ac.il/~maeira
3. Phoenicia website is the largest Web compilation and repository of studies about the origin, history, geography, religion, arts, thinkers, trade, industry, mythology, language, literature, music, wars, archaeology, and culture of the Canaanite Phoenicians — phoenicia.org/history.html

Lecture 4: King David in History and Tradition

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 5: "King David of Jerusalem") and Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 4: "The United Monarchy: Saul, David, and Solomon").

King David is one of the most beloved figures in the Hebrew Bible. He is also one of the most enigmatic. Much has been published about him in recent times, but many of the publications have centered on questions concerning his reign, his empire, and even his very existence.

Questions About the House of David

David's family tree can be traced in the Book of Matthew down until the time of Jesus (although there it is presented as Jesus' family tree being traced back to David). David and his descendants ruled over all of Israel and then over just Judah and Jerusalem, from approximately 1000 BCE until 586 BCE. David was certainly no model citizen, and yet he is treated with reverence, respect, and an almost religious zeal.

Anyone trying to study and make sense of David's reign is going to be faced with a number of major problems and questions, as a number of other scholars have already pointed out. For example, does archaeology actually agree with the Bible—did David have a mighty kingdom, as the biblical account says? Unfortunately, even such basic questions are extremely difficult to answer, for extra-biblical evidence is scarce to non-existent



David with the Head of Goliath
Jacob van Oost, the Elder, 1648

and, even where it does exist, is frequently the object of much scholarly (and heated) debate.

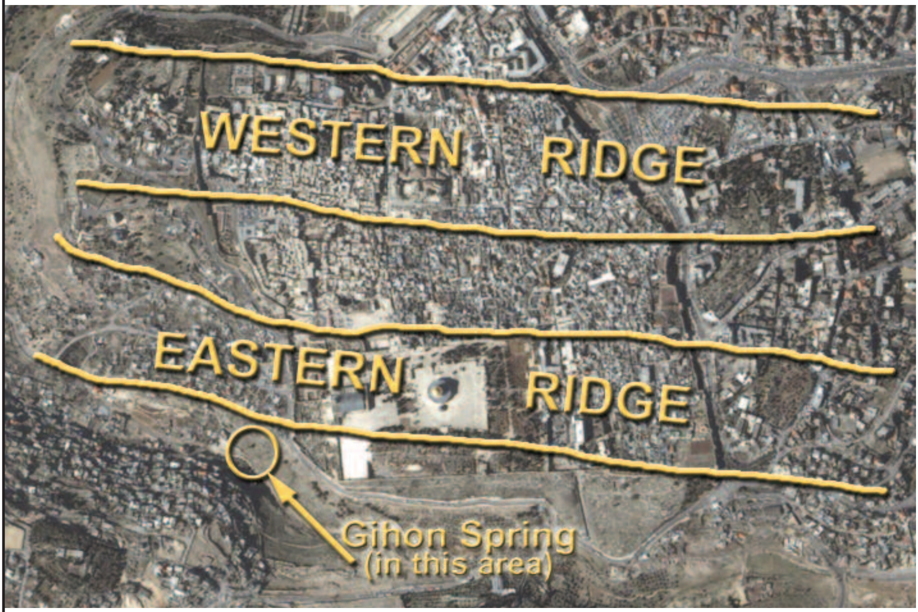
David and Jerusalem

The story of David reads like a modern soap opera: plenty of sex, violence, and struggles for power. Of all the stories, actions, and deeds, however, probably the single most important event was his capture of the city of Jerusalem.

David's capture of Jerusalem is what brought Judaism to the city and began the long association of the city with three of the great religions of the world: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He himself took the city in order to make it the capital city of his kingdom, for it lay in a neutral area approximately midway between the northern and southern extremes of his territory, according to the Hebrew Bible.

Once he captured the city from its previous inhabitants, the Jebusites, David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Eventually, the Ark was moved on top of Mt. Moriah—to the rock on which Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac. This is the rock that today is inside the Dome of the Rock, and which once lay inside Solomon's Temple. Indeed, Solomon built his Temple, among other reasons, specifically to house the Ark of the Covenant. Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem made the city not only David's political capital, but also the religious capital for both David and, later, Solomon.

Unfortunately, archaeology has been unable to pinpoint structures that definitely belong to David's Jerusalem, aside from recent claims by Eilat Mazar to have discovered David's palace. There is not much that can be conclusively said to date to the tenth century in Jerusalem, and so there has been an



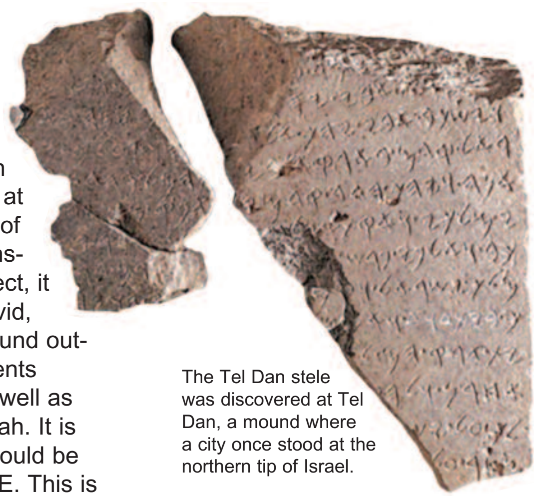
A satellite view of modern Jerusalem showing areas of the city during the time of David and the Jebusites

ongoing debate about the size and extent of David's Jerusalem, and his entire kingdom, for that matter. So far there is no archaeological evidence that Jerusalem was anything more than a modest highland village during the time of David and Solomon. It is true that there is little evidence for what Jerusalem looked like in the tenth century BCE, but many see the downgrading of David and Solomon as rather ominous, as part of a political agenda that gives ammunition to people who might be anti-Israel or anti-Semitic.

The other aspect that David's capture of Jerusalem has given rise to is the political ramifications. Indeed, the original battle fought between David and the Jebusites three thousand years ago for control of Jerusalem is still being fought today, mostly because the modern Israelis claim to be descendants from the Israelites and the modern Palestinians claim to be descendants of the Canaanites and the Philistines. So the modern political and physical battles between Israelis and Palestinians echo the original battle between David and the Jebusites.

Mentions of David

David's very existence was being called into question as recently as the late 1980s. However, in 1993 and 1994, three fragments of an inscription in old Aramaic were discovered at the site of Tel Dan, in the north of Israel. If the restoration and translation of the inscription are correct, it contains the first mention of David, or rather the House of David, found outside the Bible. The three fragments mention the House of David as well as the kings of both Israel and Judah. It is now clear that the inscription should be dated to about the year 842 BCE. This is the first time that the name David has been found in any ancient inscription outside the Bible, and it would therefore be the oldest extra-biblical reference to Israel apart from the Merneptah stele, which dates to 1207 BCE.



The Tel Dan stele was discovered at Tel Dan, a mound where a city once stood at the northern tip of Israel.

Biblical Minimalism

Among those who had been calling David's very existence into question before the discovery of the Tel Dan stele are a group of scholars sometimes referred to by others as biblical minimalists (some call them the Copenhagen school).

Biblical minimalists take the view that the Bible is a narrative of mythology interwoven with some historical elements, and that trying to read the Bible as a historical text in the modern sense of the term is doomed from the start. They say this because the Bible is written in a tradition of storytelling and religious worship, not with the intention of relating facts. They say that the United Monarchy and the figures of David and Solomon are legendary and

not historical at all. In short, biblical minimalists say that the Bible is nearly irrelevant for constructing the history of ancient Palestine and especially of the ancient Israelites.

Essentially, biblical minimalism arose out of the need to account for the major discrepancies between the Bible and what archaeologists have dug up in Israel and Palestine. How much can archaeology prove or corroborate the biblical account? The arguments about the legitimacy of David and whether or not he existed are part of this debate, which is one of the most fiercely debated issues in biblical archaeology.

The Ongoing Debate

While the biblical stories paint a picture of David in intense detail, there is still no archaeological evidence to prove any of them and indeed, until the finding of the Tel Dan stele, there was no extra-biblical evidence mentioning David whatsoever. It is now thought possible, however, that the House of David may also be mentioned in the so-called Mesha stele, and perhaps in an Egyptian inscription carved by the Pharaoh Shishak (Sheshonq) as well, so there is now at least some evidence that someone named David did actually exist. But whether it is the biblical David or some other David is still being argued. It is a topic that continues to generate controversy, to say the least.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why was David's capture of Jerusalem so noteworthy?
2. Where is the first mention of David believed to be found?

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1. The Jewish Virtual Library provides a short biblical biography of David by Shira Schoenberg — www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/David.html
2. Article by William M. Schniedewind, Chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Languages & Cultures at the University of California in Los Angeles entitled "The Tel Dan Stele: New Light on Aramaic and Jehu's Revolt," from the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research,* 302, 1996 — www.nelc.ucla.edu/Faculty/Schniedewind.htm

Lecture 5: King Solomon in History and Tradition

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 6: "The Reign of Solomon") and Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 4: "The United Monarchy: Saul, David, and Solomon").

King Solomon is renowned in the Hebrew Bible for his wisdom, wealth, and wives. He is credited with an empire that stretched from Egypt to the Euphrates. However, like his father David, Solomon and his accomplishments have become the subjects of recent controversy. Indeed, it is highly doubtful that his empire was anywhere near as big as the Bible claims it to have been. More likely, it was about the size of the modern state of Israel as it exists now, if even that.

Wisdom, Women, and Wealth

Solomon's reign lasted for forty years, from approximately 970 to 930 BCE. The principal achievement of his reign is undoubtedly the expansion of Jerusalem and the construction of the First Temple, which he ordered built to house the Ark of the Covenant, according to the biblical account. He reportedly also built at least one palace in Jerusalem and expanded the city greatly. Of him, the Book of 1 Kings says "*Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind*" (1 Kings 10:23–24).



Public Domain

Solomon by Gustave Doré, from *The Bible and Its Story Taught by One Thousand Picture Lessons,* vol. 7, edited by Charles F. Horne and Julius A. Bewer, 1908

Regarding wisdom, the most famous story told about Solomon is when he threatened, or offered, to cut a baby in half in order to satisfy justice (in the end, he did not have to do so, fortunately).

As for women, according to the biblical account, Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Among them were many foreigners, including the daughter of a Pharaoh, not to mention Moabite, Ammonite, and Hittite women. Solomon had inherited this kingdom from his father David, and by all appearances he managed to keep control of it by various diplomatic connections, including through his wives. At that time, it was common to cement a treaty by having the signers marry each other's daughters. A lot of the women in Solomon's palace may well have gotten there because of the various peace treaties that he signed with his neighbors. It is easy to see foreign politics underlying these marriages, because these are women of the countries with whom Solomon would have wished to be at peace. In particular, the daughter of the king of Egypt played a prominent role. She is mentioned five different times, which may indicate that he wanted to be friends with Egypt.



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Solomon's Idolatry
by Sebastiano Conca, ca. 1730

And as far as wealth goes, Solomon reportedly had an abundance of silver and gold. In 1 Kings 10, we are told that "*the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold, besides that which came from the traders and from the traffic of the merchants, and from all the kings of Arabia and from the governors of the land.*" However, these type of details attributed to Solomon in the biblical account are being called into question, in part because of a lack of confirmation from archaeological evidence. The meager information available today simply does not support the sweeping claims, and biblical minimalists and others claim that the account of Solomon in the Hebrew Bible bears no relation to the archaeological record or to reality.

Solomon's Temple

The city with which Solomon's name is forever linked is the city of Jerusalem, even though little or nothing of what he built there has actually been identified by archaeologists. Solomon's Temple and palace were built to the north of the Jebusite city, which David had captured and which lay on the southernmost part of this eastern ridge. Solomon built up the northern part of that eastern ridge, which is where the Temple Mount lies today.

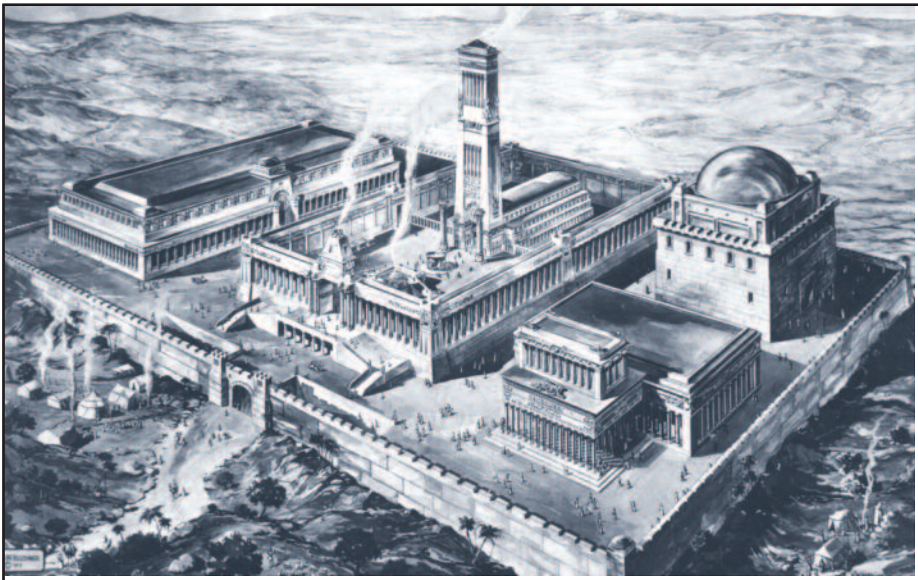


Illustration depicting John W. Kelchner's 1913 reconstruction of King Solomon's Temple

However, none of this has been confirmed by archaeology, in part because this city has been rebuilt so many times over the last couple of thousand years. The Temple Mount is today the home of the Dome of the Rock, sacred to Islam, located on the Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, as it is known to the Arab world. This particular area is the center of battles that have been fought for Jerusalem over the last four thousand years.

Descriptions of the Temple

Detailed descriptions of Solomon's Temple are found in the Book of Kings and 2 Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible. We are told that the Temple was begun in the fourth year of Solomon's forty-year-long reign, which was also the four hundred and eightieth year after the Exodus from Egypt. Solomon's building projects took exactly half his reign, twenty years, and during those twenty years, seven years were devoted to the building of the Temple. One problem here is the presence of symbolic numbers: four, forty, multiples of forty, and seven, and so it might be best not to take these numbers literally.

The Temple itself also presents a puzzle. The biblical description is not entirely clear and could be interpreted in a number of different ways, for the Bible's description of the Temple is fairly inexact. The furniture and the utensils are described in minute details, but the building itself lacks detail except for a brief notice concerning its windows. However, descriptions of the internal aspects are described in tremendous detail, including the doors to the inner sanctuary, the side chambers, and so on.

Solomon's Temple seems to have been a so-called "long-room temple," one that is oriented with the entrance on the short side and the shrine at the opposite end of the building. This type of building is not uncommon and can be found in Syria, Greece, and other places. It can be traced back to the so-

called "megaron" type of building found in Turkey and Greece in the third and second millennia BCE. As a result, the Temple seems to have been composed of three parts. First was a porch at the front, with two free-standing columns, then came the main hall or sanctuary, and then at the far end was the inner sanctuary known as the Holy of Holies. This was where the Ark of the Covenant would have been kept. One scholar claims that the Bible says the Temple was sixty cubits (about a hundred and three feet), twenty cubits (thirty-three feet) wide, and thirty cubits (fifty-one feet) high. Other scholars say that the whole building was about one hundred cubits long by fifty cubits wide (a hundred and fifty feet by seventy-five feet).

This type of temple is completely unlike the indigenous Israelite temples that existed at that time, which are called "broad-room temples" (more like a square than Solomon's Temple). Why didn't Solomon follow the more usual Israelite temple plan? Why did he build something more like that found in North Syria? The answer probably lies in the fact that when it came time for him to build a house for God, he looked to Phoenician examples. The fact that Hiram of Tyre sent craftsmen and materials to help Solomon probably also had a lot to do with it. In the end, Solomon's Temple may have looked a lot more like a Phoenician temple than an Israelite one.

Solomon's Royal Cities

In connection with Solomon's building activities, one passage in particular from the Hebrew Bible has long attracted the attention of archaeologists. The Book of Kings states "*this is the account of the forced labor which King Solomon levied to build the house of the Lord and his own house and the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem and Hazor and Megiddo and Gezer*."

Indeed, archaeological excavations at the sites of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer have uncovered architecture that has long been dated to the time of Solomon. Thus Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo have become popularly known as Solomon's royal cities. In each of these cities a multi-chambered gate has been found at the entrance, so archaeologists thought for a long time that there was a global blueprint used by Solomon's architects at each of these cities. This idea has come under attack in recent years, for it seems that these gateways might not date to the time of Solomon, but could be anywhere from a hundred to two hundred years later.



Archaeological remains at Megiddo, Israel, perhaps dating from the time of King Solomon

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What ties exist between Solomon's reign and the archaeological record?
2. What cities have become known as Solomon's royal cities?

Suggested Reading

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Marcus, Amy D. *The View from Nebo: How Archaeology Is Rewriting the Bible and Reshaping the Middle East.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000.

Websites to Visit

1. The Jewish Virtual Library provides a short biblical biography of Solomon by Shira Schoenberg — www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Solomon.html
2. The Temple Mount website provides a discussion of the Temple of Solomon by Lambert Dolphin and an extensive listing of related websites — www.templemount.org/solomon.html
3. *Ancient Worlds* website features an article entitled "King Solomon's Name Lingers at 'Armageddon' Digging Site" — www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Post/405459

Lecture 6: Excursus: The Ark of the Covenant

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 5: "David, King of Jerusalem" and chapter 6: "The Reign of Solomon").

Considered the most holy and powerful object in the Hebrew Bible, the Ark of the Covenant measured only $2\frac{1}{2}$ cubits by $1\frac{1}{2}$ cubits by $1\frac{1}{2}$ cubits (4 feet 2 inches long by 2 feet 6 inches wide by 2 feet 6 inches high).



The Power of the Ark

The description of the Ark is found in Exodus 25:10–22: "They shall make an ark of Acacia wood, two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, within and without shall you overlay it and you shall make upon it a molding of gold roundabout, and you shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet . . . and in the Ark you shall put the Testament."

In the Ark were placed the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, which God had given to the people of Israel when they came out of the land of Egypt. The tablets of the Law were what gave the Ark its power—for instance, in the Book of Joshua, it says that the walls of Jericho came tumbling down when the Ark was carried around its walls in front of the army.

Where Is the Ark?

After David moved the Ark to Jerusalem and Solomon placed it inside the Temple, there is no further mention of the Israelites carrying the Ark to war or to festivals. Some scholars note that it was not among the vessels carried into exile or brought back, suggesting that the Ark was no longer in the Temple when the city was destroyed by the Babylonians in the year 586 BCE. So the



King David Leading the Procession of the Sacred Ark into Jerusalem
by Luigi Ademollo

Ark probably disappeared sometime between the end of Solomon's reign and the time that the city was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

The Book of 2 Esdras, found only in Bibles that contain the Apocrypha, implies that the Ark was destroyed. The author, lamenting the fall of Jerusalem, says that the sanctuary was laid waste, the altar broken down, and the Ark spoiled.

Another possibility is that the Ark was captured and carried off. There is a passage in the Talmud that says that the Ark was hidden by King Josiah "in its place." There is no indication of where this might be, but according to the Talmud, Josiah hid the Ark ten or fifteen years before the destruction of the city by the Babylonians. This statement has led to the theory that the Ark is in a secret chamber carved deep beneath the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Indeed, there are chambers underneath the Mount where no one is allowed to go; some ultra-orthodox Jews claim that the Ark is down there and will be revealed at the proper time.

Great Discovery or False Sighting?

Numerous people have found, or claimed to have found, the Ark. This includes people like Ron Wyatt, who claimed to have discovered Noah's Ark, among other things. In 1979, he began excavations with his sons to find the Ark of the Covenant. They dug for a couple of years and claimed to have broken through the rocks into an open space. There they caught a glimpse of something shiny. Entering, they discovered dry-rotted wooden timbers and animal skins, which turned to powder when they moved them, as well as objects from Solomon's Temple. They couldn't uncover all the artifacts, and

yet they are confident that they saw the Ark, the Great Menorah, a large sword, a mitre with an ivory pomegranate, and so on. Unfortunately, they did not take any photographs, nor were they able to bring out any objects.

Another favorite suggestion for the location of the Ark is Mount Nebo in Jordan, on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, because 2 Maccabees says that Jeremiah hid the Ark of the Covenant there. In the autumn of 1981, Tom Crotser and his team from the Institute for Restoring Ancient History went to the Franciscan monastery on the summit of Mount Nebo. They said that they found a plaque that indicated that the Ark of the Lord was buried there. At night, they entered a tunnel that was 35 feet long and 4 feet wide. At the end of the tunnel, they ran into a wall. After knocking the stones down, they entered a small cave and discovered a large object, under whose covering they could see a golden box. They did not touch the box because they remembered what had happened to others who had touched it (namely, they were killed). So they photographed the box and withdrew. An archaeologist later looked at the photographs, which were not of the highest quality. One of them showed a very modern-looking box with a nail sticking out of one corner.

Other people have suggested that the Ark is buried in the area of the Qumran caves, but there have been major excavations in the area and no one has yet found the Ark there.

The Ark in Ethiopia

There is also a tradition that claims that the Ark is in Ethiopia. Journalist Graham Hancock, in particular, investigated this claim. According to the story, the Queen of Sheba and Solomon had a son. This son went to Ethiopia and brought the Ark with him. Eventually it reached the site of Axum. Others have tried to follow up on this theory and have traced this movement of the Ark to one particular church, but nobody has been allowed in to see the Ark, if indeed it exists there.

Future Sightings

Of course the Ark has also been the subject of Hollywood films, probably none more famous than the first Indiana Jones movie. The suggestion made in this movie, that the Ark is now in a crate inside a warehouse in southeastern Washington, DC, is probably about the only suggestion that is not still seriously being considered today. In the end, it is unlikely that the Ark will ever be found, but that small consideration will probably not stop people from searching for it.



The Ark of the Covenant Temple in Axum, Ethiopia

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the history of the Ark before its arrival in Jerusalem?
2. What are the possibilities for what became of the Ark?

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2. *Crisis* magazine website provides a feature article by associate publisher Raymond Matthew Wray entitled "On the Trail of the Ark" describing his visit to Axum, Ethiopia, in an effort to view the Ark of the Covenant — www.crisismagazine.com/julaug2002/feature2.htm
3. The Institute for Biblical and Scientific Studies provides an article entitled "Biblical Archaeology: Where Is the Ark of the Covenant?" that investigates the possibilities of the Ark's existence and location — www.bibleandscience.com/archaeology/ark.htm

Lecture 7: The Kingdom of Israel and the Omride Dynasty

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman's *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (part two: "The Rise and Fall of Ancient Israel"); J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 7: "Separate Kingdoms"; chapter 8: "The Omride Era"; and chapter 10: "The Era of Assyrian Domination: The End of the Kingdom of Israel"); and Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 5: "The Divided Monarchy: The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel").

Following the death of King Solomon, the United Monarchy dissolved and split into the Divided Kingdoms of Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The Omride dynasty was the most infamous family to rule Israel, especially in the view of the biblical writers, but then the expansionist ambitions of the Neo-Assyrians from Mesopotamia in the eighth century BCE spelled an end to the Kingdom of Israel and gave rise to the tradition of the Ten Lost Tribes.

The Kingdom Splits

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam came to the throne. The first question that he faced was whether he could hold the kingdom together. This was quickly answered when the North broke away. The northern kingdom took the name Israel, with its capital at Samaria, while the southern kingdom took the name Judah, with its capital at Jerusalem.

Pharaoh Shishak

Immediately after the death of Solomon, during the reign of Rehoboam in Judah and Jeroboam, the new king of Israel, the Bible tells of the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak, who besieged Jerusalem. At the same time, the Egyptian accounts talk about a Pharaoh named Shoshenq (note the similarity between the names) who campaigned against the Northern Kingdom of Israel.



Public Domain

The Arrogance of Rehoboam
by Hans Holbein, the Younger, ca. 1530

Pharaoh Shoshenq was a Libyan mercenary who

founded the twenty-second dynasty of Egypt and ruled from about 945 to 923 BCE. He came to the throne toward the end of Solomon's rule.



© Bettmann/CORBIS

The wall at Karnak, Egypt, showing Shoshenq's city list. Among the hieroglyphs (rendered here as an inset illustration) is one showing the figure of an enemy captive with his arms tied behind his back and a shield covering him. On the shield is written "Judah-Melek-Land," which means the "kingdom of Judah."

Shoshenq left behind (on the wall of a temple in Karnak in Egypt) an impressive list of cities that he claimed to have captured. The cities are all located in the region now called Israel and Judah. According to the inscription, he captured Megiddo, Taanach, Shunem, and other cities and towns in Israel and the Negev. Shoshenq's campaign, on the heels of the death of Solomon, indicates that he had been waiting for Solomon to die and that the splitting of the kingdoms was to his benefit. His campaign in the lands of Israel and Judah was probably an attempt to recapture some of the glory days of Egyptian dominance, when Canaan was regarded as belonging to the Egyptian empire. However, because one cannot always believe the evidence put forward by Egyptian Pharaohs, it has to be asked whether this campaign actually happened.

In Egypt, Shoshenq claimed that he captured Megiddo, while at Megiddo, there is an inscription indicating that Shoshenq captured the city, so the campaign probably did take place. The next question to be asked is whether this Egyptian Pharaoh is the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak who is mentioned in the Bible and who fought in Judah—and besieged Jerusalem—some five years after the death of Solomon.

Are these Pharaohs the same person? The cities that are named in the Egyptian account are almost all from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The cities named in the biblical account are almost all from the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Were there in fact two different Egyptian Pharaohs, one who attacked Israel and one who attacked Judah? The biblical accounts are concerned with the events in Judah, which didn't put up much of a fight. The Egyptian account emphasizes the major military events that took place in the North. It's highly unlikely that these are records of different campaigns, so

these are probably two versions of the same military conquests, and there are not two Pharaohs, just one, for Shishak and Shoshenq are probably one and the same.

The Omrides

The Omrides far surpassed any other kings in either Israel or Judah as both builders and administrators. In a sense, theirs was the first golden age of the Israelite kings. Yet in the Hebrew Bible, the description of the Omride kingdom is quite sketchy. While the Bible mentions elaborate Omride palaces at Samaria and Jezreel, there is almost no reference to the size, scale, or opulence of their kingdom.

Indeed, these northern kings are despised by the authors of the Bible and referred to in derogatory terms. The writers of the Hebrew Bible consistently tried to uphold the kings of Judah in the South rather than the evil kings of Israel in the North. Yet the kings in the North, the Omrides, were impressive.

For example, the city of Samaria was built by Omri and became the capital city of the North. When the site was first excavated in 1908 by Harvard University, the splendor of Omri's buildings was revealed. It was conceived as the capital city of the Omride dynasty, and, as such, reveals fittingly grandiose architecture from the time of both Omri and Ahab.

As mentioned in a previous lecture, the chambered gates at the entrance to the cities of Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo were for a long time identified as part of Solomon's grand building plan, but they have now been redated by some archaeologists to the time of Omri and Ahab. In addition, some of the palaces at Megiddo, and perhaps even the so-called stables at Megiddo, might have to be redated from the time of Solomon in the tenth century to the time of Ahab and Omri in the ninth century and perhaps even into the eighth centuries BCE.



Top: Aerial view of the hills of Samaria, Israel. Bottom: Ruins at Sebastia, once called Samaria, an ancient city that served as the capital of the Kingdom of Northern Israel during the rule of King Ahab.

The most impressive engineering achievements possibly linked to the Omrides are the enormous underground water tunnels cut through the bedrock beneath the cities of Megiddo and Hazor. These tunnels provided the cities' inhabitants with secure access to drinking water even in times of siege. In the ancient Near East, this was a critical challenge, because while important cities were surrounded by elaborate fortifications that allowed them to withstand a siege, they seldom had a source of fresh water within a city's walls.

Neo-Assyrians and the Ten Lost Tribes

During the period of the Divided Monarchy, the Kingdom of Israel was at the mercy of a new set of empires that were emerging elsewhere in the ancient Near East. The first of these large empires was the Neo-Assyrians. For much of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, the Assyrians dominated life in the Middle East. To put it mildly, the Kingdom of Israel did not fare well at their hands. The capital city of Samaria was captured in the year 722 BCE and by the year 720 BCE the Kingdom of Israel had been incorporated into the Neo-Assyrian Empire and had, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist.

What happened to the people living in the Kingdom of Israel? More than twenty-seven thousand people were carried off into exile. These were the famous Ten Lost Tribes, who were never to be seen again. Where are they today? The question remains unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable. Like the Ark of the Covenant and Noah's Ark, it is going to be difficult to ever find the Ten Lost Tribes. And yet the quest to locate them continues today, and numerous books are published every decade claiming that the authors have found the Lost Tribes or know where to look for them.

Questions

1. What evidence is there that Shishak and Shoshenq were the same person?
2. Who were the Ten Lost Tribes?

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Other Books of Interest

Cline, Eric H. *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Websites to Visit

1. Dr. K.C. Hanson's website provides a translation of the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III — www.kchanson.com/ANCDOCS/meso/obelisk.html
2. *Livius Articles on Ancient History* website article by Jona Lendering discussing the history of the Kingdom of Israel from 931 to 724 BCE — www.livius.org/io-iz/israel/kingdom.html
3. PBS television program *Nova* website provides a synopsis of its program "Lost Tribes of Israel" that aired February 22, 2000 — www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/israel

Lecture 8: The Kingdom of Judah Until the Time of Sennacherib

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman's *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (chapter 9: "The Transformation of Judah"); J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 7: "Separate Kingdoms"; chapter 9: "The Century of the Jehu Dynasty"; and chapter 11: "The Era of Assyrian Domination: Judean History from Ahaz to Amon"); and Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 5: "The Divided Monarchy: The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel").

The Kingdom of Judah consistently found itself caught between mighty empires far to the north in Mesopotamia and far to the south in Egypt during the four hundred years of its existence.

Development of the Kingdoms

Until recently, most archaeologists took the biblical description of Judah and Israel at face value. They showed Judah as being a fully developed state as early as the time of Solomon. But recent evidence published by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman in their book *The Bible Unearthed* shows that accomplishments attributed to Solomon should be downdated by a century or more. Finkelstein, Silberman, and other archaeologists have argued that the early kings of Judah were not the equal of the kings of Israel, that not a trace of literary activity has been found in the tenth century, or even in the ninth century, and that monumental inscriptions and personal objects with names of individuals appear in Judah only two hundred years after the time of Solomon.



Sudden Expansion

Similarly, archaeological surveys indicate that until the eighth century, the population of the highlands (the hills in Judah) was about one-tenth the population found in similar highlands in the North. Of the twelve tribes of Israel, ten were in the North; only two were in the South.

Judah underwent a long, gradual development over hundreds of years, in large part because it had limited economic potential. It was isolated geographically and was tradition bound. But with the rise of the Neo-Assyrians in Mesopotamia and their attacks on Israel, Judah began to expand.

Excavations conducted in Jerusalem have shown that, at the end of the eighth century BCE, Jerusalem underwent an unprecedented population explosion. Its residential areas expanded from the former narrow ridge on the east to cover the entire western ridge as well, as the city doubled in size. A formidable defensive wall was constructed to include these new suburbs. In a matter of decades, Jerusalem went from a modest highland town of about ten or twelve acres to a huge urban area of a hundred and fifty acres of densely packed houses, workshops, and public buildings.

In demographic terms, the city's population may have increased as much as fifteen times. Finkelstein and Silberman state that a similar picture of tremendous population growth emerges from the archaeological surveys conducted outside Jerusalem, in its hinterland. In the districts south of the capital city, relatively empty countryside filled with new farming settlements. What had been sleepy little villages became real towns.

In the Grip of the Neo-Assyrians

In the final years of the eighth century BCE, Judah saw a chance to break free from the Neo-Assyrian grip. The powerful king Sargon II died, leaving his throne to a young, untested son named Sennacherib. The Neo-Assyrian empire was preoccupied with troubles to the east, so the king of Jerusalem, Hezekiah, thought it was a good time to rebel, and tried to play the two great empires of the day (Egypt to the south and Assyria to the north) off against each other—with little success.

The Book of 2 Kings states that Hezekiah rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. In these early years of Sennacherib, who came to the throne in 705 BCE, Hezekiah participated in a widespread revolt against Assyrian rule. He withheld the payment of his tribute to Assyria, but the revolt was quickly suppressed by Sennacherib and the Neo-Assyrians in the year 701 BCE.



The Defeat of Sennacherib
by Hendrik Pietersz de Hondt, ca. 1650

The account of Sennacherib's campaign is found in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, as well as in Sennacherib's own account. Jerusalem was surrounded. An Assyrian general, speaking for his king, addressed the people and offered them two options: surrender or die. The Assyrian general's arrogance provoked Hezekiah to pray and ask for divine assistance in defending Jerusalem. According to the Book of Isaiah, an angel of God was sent out that very night and killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians. When the people of Jerusalem awoke the next morning, the city was surrounded by dead soldiers. Sennacherib retreated back to his capital, Nineveh, where he was subsequently killed by his sons while praying.

Hezekiah's Tunnel

The Assyrian attack on Jerusalem was no surprise to Hezekiah. He clearly saw it coming. According to Sennacherib's own records, the Assyrians conquered forty-six cities in Judah before attacking Jerusalem. Jerusalem was well protected, though, so Sennacherib decided to subdue the city by siege. Hezekiah had no doubt prepared for the siege by laying in vast stores of food. But water presented a more difficult problem. The city's water supply lay outside the city, near the floor of the Kidron Valley. Hezekiah solved this problem by building a tunnel that led under the city, from the spring to a pool known as the Siloam Pool on the other side of town. Hezekiah's Tunnel was dug through 1,750 feet of solid rock.

Attack at Lachish

The other major city that Sennacherib attacked in 701 BCE was the city of Lachish, which was the second most important city in Judah. Unlike Jerusalem, however, Lachish was not able to hold out and was attacked and destroyed by Sennacherib. There are no fewer than four independent accounts of its destruction: first, the biblical account; second, an account by Sennacherib himself; third, an account in pictures that Sennacherib put up in his palace at Nineveh; and fourth, the archaeological evidence.

Lachish was the scene of excavations for many years, directed in large part by David Ussishkin of Tel Aviv University. Archaeology makes clear that the Assyrians mounted their siege of the city from the southwest, which makes sense topographically. They built a large siege ramp, up which they could push their war engines up against the walls of the city. The Judeans defending the city built a counter-ramp; archaeologists have discovered both the Assyrian siege ramp and the Judean counter-ramp.

Back at Nineveh, Sennacherib's capital city, the battle of Lachish was depicted in scene after scene carved into stone, beginning with the phalanxes of infantry marching toward the battle and ending with the deportation of the conquered Judeans.

These reliefs show that Lachish ultimately fell, and that the defenders were deported or killed. After the capture of Lachish, Sennacherib made his way to Jerusalem, but Jerusalem, in turn, did not fall. Jerusalem probably paid a bribe to Sennacherib and was allowed to continue as the capital city of Judah. However, this would not be the last time that Jerusalem came under attack from a foreign power, and, in fact, the days of Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Judah were numbered.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What are the major cultural, climatic, and topographical differences between Israel and Judah?
2. How did Hezekiah's Tunnel help Jerusalem to withstand the siege by Sennacherib?

Suggested Reading

Finkelstein, Israel, and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.

Miller, J. Maxwell, and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986.

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. 2nd rev. ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

Other Books of Interest

Cline, Eric H. *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Websites to Visit

1. Washington State University website: *The Hebrews: The Two Kingdoms, 920–597 BCE* by Professor Richard Hooker — www.wsu.edu/~dee/HEBREWS/2KINGDOM.HTM
2. *The American Association for the Advancement of Science Eurek Alert!* website provides a press release by Jerry Barach of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem entitled "Dating of King Hezekiah's Tunnel Verified by Scientists" — www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2003-09/huoj-dok090903.php
3. *Jewish Virtual Library* website features a short article entitled "Lachish: Royal City of the Kingdom of Judah" — www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Archaeology/lachish.html

Lecture 9: Neo-Babylonians and the End of the Kingdom of Judah

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman's *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (Part III: "Judah and the Making of Biblical History"); J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 12: "The Last Years of the Davidic Kingdom"); and Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 5: "The Divided Monarchy: The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel").

Judah rose to great prominence in the seventh century BCE, after Israel was destroyed by the Neo-Assyrians. Unfortunately for Judah, it would come to an end not much more than a century later. Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem not once, but twice, burning the Temple to the ground and exiling the leading citizens to the faraway city of Babylon.

King Josiah

Josiah came to the throne of Judah in the year 639 BCE at the age of eight. Halfway through his reign, he began a series of far-reaching reforms. A scroll of laws was found in the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and Josiah realized that the people of Judah had strayed from where they should have been, religiously speaking. He therefore implemented sweeping religious and political reforms.

Along with these reforms, Josiah was actively involved in expanding Judah's territory to the north. He annexed the city of Samaria, which had been the former capital of Israel. He also annexed Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley. He was probably trying to take Judah back to the greatness of the United Monarchy three hundred years earlier. Unfortunately, Josiah ran up against the Egyptians.



A depiction of Josiah listening as the scrolls found in Solomon's Temple are read to him

A Period of Tremendous Turbulence

For many who study ancient history and religion, the meeting of Josiah and Pharaoh Necho II is considered the most significant of the battles that took place in the Jezreel Valley.



In this illustration, the mortally wounded Josiah is removed from the battlefield in the Jezreel Valley.

In the spring or the summer of 609, Necho II of Egypt and his army headed northward, up to the city of Carchemish. They were going to the aid of their ally, the Assyrians, and were scheduled to fight against their common foe, the Babylonians. Because the battle was to be fought at Carchemish in northern Syria, Necho's army had to traverse the length of Judah to get there. He asked permission from Josiah for his army to march through Judah en route to northern Syria. Josiah refused to grant permission to the Egyptians and instead marched with his army up to the Jezreel Valley and waited for the Egyptian army there. When the Egyptians came into the valley, they found the Judean army waiting.

Unfortunately for Josiah, just as the battle got under way, he was hit with an arrow. Either dead or dying, Josiah was transported out of the battle and taken south to Jerusalem, where he was buried along with his dreams for a rejuvenated Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians

After the death of Josiah, Judah suffered a period of tremendous turbulence. By 605 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians had emerged as the prime power in the region. Judah was under the thumb of the Neo-Babylonians for the next twenty or more years.

Nebuchadnezzar came to the throne of the Neo-Babylonians in 605 BCE and ruled for the next forty-three years. One of the first things he did was expand his empire to the south, down into Judah and beyond. He destroyed the cities of Ashkelon and perhaps Ekron in the year 604.

Josephus, writing about six hundred years after the actual events, says that Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in the year 598 and put the king, Jehoachim, to death for rebelling and failing to pay tribute. He also exiled many of the leading citizens of the city or put them to death at that time.



© Clipart.com

Judeans are exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers.

The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem

The Bible provides a similar account to Josephus's, although a bit more ambiguous. After Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, he exiled three thousand people, including the prophet Ezekiel. This is the first of what will be no fewer than four deportations, which together became known as the Babylonian Exile, in which the leading people of Jerusalem were taken away as captives to Babylon. The worst, though, was yet to come, because Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem at least twice more, in 597 and 586 BCE.

The siege tactics were the standard ones used by the Neo-Babylonians everywhere and were the same ones that had been used by the Neo-Assyrians. They built siege ramps and a dike to surround the city, and it was only after a breach had been made in the fortification walls that the Babylonians were able to enter the city. The inhabitants had been reduced by famine and disease and offered little resistance.

The Book of 2 Kings says that the famine was so severe in the city by the end of the siege that there was no food for the people of the land. And the book of Lamentations says that "the hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children," suggesting that the famine was so severe that people were reduced to cannibalism.

Interestingly, archaeologists have found no fewer than three toilets in the ruins of the city that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed in 586 BCE. They were able to excavate the material in at least one of the toilets. Looking at the feces and other remains underneath a microscope, the archaeologists were able to determine that the people of Jerusalem, in 586, were not eating what would be expected. They were not eating wheat, barley, or other grains. Instead, they were eating backyard plants: mustard grass, dandelions, and weeds.

The archaeologists also found something else that was very interesting. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were suffering from parasites, particularly from tapeworm and whipworm, contracted from living in unsanitary conditions, using polluted water, or even fertilizing using human waste rather than other kinds of fertilizer. There is also evidence that they were not cooking their meat properly, perhaps an indication that there was not enough wood or other fuel available. Fortunately, human remains were not found in the toilet, so it seems that the people of Jerusalem had not been reduced to eating their children after all.

The Destruction of the Temple

There are some discrepancies in the biblical accounts as to when exactly all of these events took place, but the destruction of the Temple is traditionally said to have taken place on the ninth of Av (August 16, 586 BCE). Archaeology has confirmed that the destruction of the city was complete. The Temple of Solomon was destroyed; its treasures were looted and carried off to Babylon. Considering that Nebuchadnezzar had attacked and besieged Jerusalem several times during his reign, it’s not surprising that he finally burned the city to the ground. Some scholars propose that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon was a calculated act to remove the House of David forever, after it had proved disloyal time and time again.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why is the meeting of Josiah and Necho II considered the most important of the battles that took place in the Jezreel Valley?
2. How was it determined that the people of Jerusalem probably did not resort to cannibalism during the siege of Nebuchadnezzar?

Suggested Reading

Finkelstein, Israel, and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.

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Sweeney, Marvin A. *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Websites to Visit

1. Professor Michael Zank, Boston University, website provides an article entitled "Babylonian Exile and Beyond" — www.bu.edu/mzank/Jerusalem/cp/exret.htm
2. Globusz Publishing features a short article on Zedekiah from Louis Grinzberg's *The Legends of the Jews,* vol. IV — www.globusz.com/ebooks/LegJew4/00000097.htm
3. *Livius Articles on Ancient History* website article by Jona Lendering discussing the history of the Babylonian Empire — www.livius.org/io-iz/israel/kingdom.html

Lecture 10: Persians and Greeks in Judea

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman's *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (chapter 12: "Exile and Return"); J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes's *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (chapter 13: "The Period of Babylonian Domination" and chapter 14: "The Era of the Persian Empire"); and Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 6: "Exile and Return: From the Babylonian Destruction to the Reconstruction of the Jewish State" and chapter 7: "The Age of Hellenism: Alexander the Great and the Rise and Fall of the Hasmonean Kingdom").

The immediate results of the Babylonian conquests are clear. Much of the country was destroyed, and though a fair number of citizens were killed, even more were taken into exile.

Life in Exile

The exile in Babylon lasted for about fifty years, from 586 to 539 BCE. It had an enormous impact on the Jewish people and the evolution of religious thought for the Western world. For example, it is during this time that the books of the Pentateuch were edited into their final form and religious practices evolved into what was going to become Second Temple Judaism and ultimately early Christianity.

The exile occurred in four different phases. There were deportations in the years 598, 597, 586, and 582 BCE. All told, just under fifteen thousand people were exiled: three thousand in 598, ten thousand in 597, just under a thousand in 586, and about 745 in the year 582 BCE.

Scholars have estimated that there were probably about seventy-five thousand people in Judah at this time and about fifteen thousand in Jerusalem. If this is accurate, that would mean about 70 percent of the population still remained in Judah even after the final set of deportations in 582 BCE.

In the exile, a number of Jews lived in Egypt and other places as well as Babylon. For example, the prophet Jeremiah went to Egypt rather than Babylon, along with quite a number of his fellow Judeans.

There are also some non-Jewish accounts of life in exile. For example, in the Babylonian materials, there are royal cuneiform texts that talk about King Jehoachin in exile. And there are numerous documents in Aramaic from Egypt that provide information about the people there. The most significant of these are the Elephantine papyri. They were found in the late 1800s at Elephantine Island, opposite Aswan in Egypt, and were from a Jewish military settlement. The documents present many of the legal and religious conditions that existed in the colony. Most of the documents date from the fifth and

fourth century BCE, but they can nevertheless be used to reconstruct the Babylonian period.

Contrary to popular opinion, the people in exile did not live in bad conditions. They were simply treated in the same way as exiles from any other nation. They were settled all over the place in Babylonia. They served in the military, could own property and slaves, and occasionally even became quite wealthy. They were relatively free and were able to practice their religion. There was little or no pressure to assimilate.

The Returner of the Dispersed

The middle years of the sixth century BCE saw the rise of a new power in the ancient Near East: the Persians. They quickly established the largest Near Eastern empire that had ever existed. The person behind this was Cyrus the Great, who took over all of the lands previously occupied by Assyrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians. The Persians ruled this area for over two hundred years, from 539 until the time of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE. Essentially, the people of Judah and Israel traded one overlord for another. After living under Persian rule, the people of Judah and Israel fell under the control of the Greeks and then the Romans, with only small interludes of independence in between.

In September of 539, the Persians defeated the Babylonian army. Soon thereafter, the Persians took Babylon. A Persian text reads, “On the sixteenth day the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle. On the twenty-ninth of October, Cyrus himself entered Babylon. There was peace in the city as Cyrus spoke his greeting to all of Babylon.”

It is not an accident that history remembers Cyrus as a great liberator, for when he captured Babylon, he issued proclamations that allowed all of the people in exile to return home. Including among these were the Judeans, who were allowed to go back home to Jerusalem and Judah. Cyrus is therefore portrayed as the restorer of the gods and their sanctuaries, the returner of the dispersed.

Persian Rule

When the exiles returned, rival Judeans had differing opinions of who should be in charge. Eventually, after much squabbling, they rebuilt the Temple and rededicated it in 516 BCE.

During the Persian period, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were ruled by a governor who reported back to Persia, but for the most part, the inhabitants were left



The Persian king Cyrus

to their own devices. It was during this period that the word *Jews* came into play, referring to the people who lived in Judea.

Alexander the Great

The period of Persian rule lasted for about two hundred years. It was a relatively quiet period for the Jews, but it came to an end when Alexander the Great and the Greeks appeared on the scene, late in the fourth century BCE. Alexander conquered the Persians between 324 and 333. He took control of most of the Persian empire, including the province that they called Yehud (the area which we have been calling Judea, Judah, and Israel).

Under Alexander, the Greeks ruled most of the ancient Near East. But when he died in 323, having named no successor, the empire collapsed and was split up under his generals. The period when the Greeks ruled Judea was known as the Hellenistic Age, which lasted for approximately three centuries, from 323 until 30 BCE. This was a period that began with Alexander's death in Babylon and was a time characterized by upheaval. Alexander's successors fought over his empire for the next three hundred years. There were feuds between the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in the Levant (the area of modern-day Israel and Syria). The Ptolemies in Egypt regarded Jerusalem and the surrounding territories as their own, while the Seleucids regarded it is as their own. Jerusalem itself was ground zero for more than twenty conflicts that took place during these years.

The Maccabean Rebellion

In 167 BCE, the Maccabean Rebellion began. This was a rebellion by the Judeans against the Greek overlords. The Jews hoped to form their own independent kingdoms. The rebellion was led by Judas Maccabees (Judas the Hammer) from the family of Hasmon. The rebels fought the Greeks and were eventually victorious. They were able to recapture and rededicate the Temple. During the cleaning of the Temple, they found oil to light the flame of the Great Menorah for eight full days, until more sacred oil could be found. It is from this that Hanukkah and the Festival of Lights are celebrated today.

After the successful rebellion, the Jews planned to set up their own kingdom. However, it was not until 142 that they were able to establish a new dynasty called the Hasmonean Kingdom. It would last until 63 BCE, only to come to an abrupt end when the Romans, in the form of Pompey the Great, made all of Judah, Israel, and Syria into a Roman province with the name of *Syria-Palestina*.

The Maccabean Rebellion was more than just a struggle for religious freedom. It was for national liberation, independence, and the establishment of a free Jewish state. There would not be another one until 1948.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What was life like for the Jews in exile?
2. What events led to the Maccabean Rebellion?

Suggested Reading

Finkelstein, Israel, and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.

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Websites to Visit

1. Ancient History Sourcebook at Fordham University provides an article entitled "Kurash (Cyrus) the Great: The Decree of Return for the Jews, 539 BCE" — www.fordham.edu/HALSALL/ancient/539cyrus1.html
2. Syracuse University website features a short article entitled "The Jewish Diaspora in the Hellenistic Period" — classes.maxwell.syr.edu/his301-001/jeishh_diaspora_in_greece.htm
3. *Slate* (an e-magazine of the *Washington Post*) features an article entitled "The Maccabees and the Hellenists: Hanukkah as Jewish Civil War" by James Ponet from December 22, 2005 — www.slate.com/id/2133068

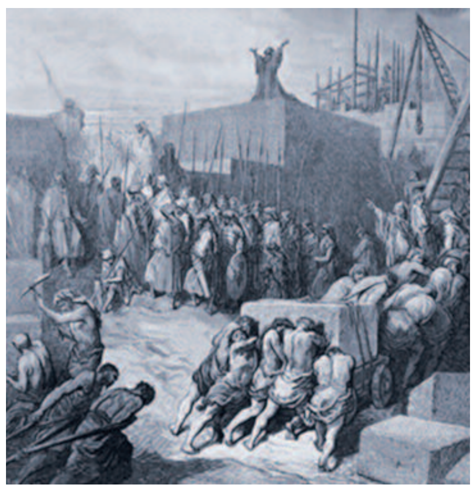
Lecture 11: The Coming of the Romans and Christianity

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 8: "Roman Domination: The Jewish Revolt").

In 63 BCE, Pompey and the Romans ended the rule of the Hasmonean Dynasty and took over Jerusalem. In 40 BCE, Herod, a Jew by religion, was placed in charge. In the year 30, he was recognized by the Romans as the king of the Jews. He ruled over the whole of the territory as well as other districts. This is the region known as Palestine to the Romans.

Restoration of the Temple

Herod remained in power for thirty years and proved to be an ambitious builder. He rebuilt the city walls of Jerusalem, which may have been as large as 230 acres and may have had a population of as many as forty-thousand permanent inhabitants.



Rebuilding of the Temple

In approximately 19 BCE, Herod began his most ambitious building project, renovating the Second Temple, which had originally been finished in about the year 516 BCE by the Jews who had returned from Babylon. Now five hundred years old, it was beginning to show signs of its age.

Herod wanted to make the Temple one of the eight wonders of the ancient world. He doubled the size of the platform on which it stood to about thirty-five acres. In addition, as part of the expansion of the Temple Mount, he had arches built underground and then paved over to extend the area for building. It is these underground arches that are today erroneously called Solomon's Stables, even though they were not built by Solomon or used as stables, except by the Crusaders.

The so-called Western (or Wailing) Wall was the western retaining wall of the Temple Mount as built by Herod. In restoring the Temple, Herod essentially built a new Temple, but in order for it not to be seen as a new Temple, he had all the building materials prepared beforehand and then trained the



Jerusalem and the Temple of Herod
by James Tissot, ca. 1886–1894

priests as carpenters and masons and bricklayers, so that the religious services continued during the building and reconstruction. As a result, even though this Temple should be called the Third Temple, technically speaking, Herod's is still called the Second Temple.

The Life of Jesus

Things remained reasonably quiet in Jerusalem for the next thirty years. It was during this period that the territory became a Roman province and was put under the governance of a Roman procurator. This period also saw the birth of Jesus, either in the year 7 or the year 4 BCE, and it was during this time, just after the death of Herod, that Jesus grew to adulthood.

Some of the events that are well known in the life of Jesus took place in the Temple restored by Herod. The best known of the events are depicted in the Gospels, specifically in Matthew 21, where it says, "Jesus entered the Temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the Temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, it is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers. And the blind and the lame came to him in the Temple and he healed them."

The Origins of Christianity

The triumph of Christianity represents one of the most remarkable cultural revolutions in history. Up until this time, the Greek and Roman philosophers had taught the notion of *carpe diem*, because they believed there was nothing beyond this world. Christians, on the other hand, taught about an afterlife in Heaven. So Christianity started out appealing to slaves, the underclass, and the army.

There are two origins for Christianity: the so-called mystery religions and Judaism. Mystery religions were so termed because only initiates knew what occurred within them. These religions explained the ultimate mystery of life and offered life after death. They had strange initiation rights, and they worshiped heroes who had conquered death.

Examples of mystery religions include those built around Mithras, Orpheus, Adonis, and Osiris, all pagan gods. Mithras was a favorite of the Roman Army, and was usually accompanied by a scorpion, a dog, and frequently, a bull. Initiates were placed underneath a white bull, whose neck was then cut, and the initiates were splashed from head to toe with the blood of the sacrificial bull. Orpheus's lyre attracted animals, and Adonis was extremely good looking (of course).

These gods all shared common characteristics. Another figure who fit the pattern of the mystery religions was Jesus. He was a hero who was said to have explained the ultimate purpose of life. It was thought that he offered his followers personal salvation. There were mysterious rituals of initiation, such as baptism. His followers believed that he had risen from the dead.

There are, however, some differences. The major difference is that Jesus was a historical person and the others were not. Moreover, Christianity required an upright and moral life, and the mystery religions did not.

Jesus in History

The earliest accounts of Jesus date from decades after his death. There are therefore many problems in arriving at a clear picture of his life. The sources themselves present difficulties, because Jesus wrote nothing and his life is only seen through the writings of others, all of whom wrote well after the death of Jesus.

These earliest writings probably date from about the year 70 CE. The latest date from about the year 100 CE. It is thought that the New Testament itself was collected and collated in about the year 90, that is, at the end of the first century CE. Even in the books of the New Testament, the authors concentrate on the miracles of Jesus, not on his life in chronological order. Thus, little is known about his life as a child or as a young adult. It's similar to the Hebrew Bible in that descriptions are not meant as history but as statements of faith by true believers.

According to his followers, Jesus was the son of Mary; he was born in either 7 or 4 BCE. The dating system used today was determined by Dennis the Monk in about the sixth or seventh century after the birth of Christ. He was trying to figure out when Christ was born, but miscounted by either four or seven years. Thus, Jesus was born either in the year 7 or 4 BCE, in the province of Judea or Palestina.

At about the age of thirty, Jesus was publicly baptized, and thereafter entered into a life of teaching. He was an effective teacher, in the tradition of the Israelite prophets and of the teachers of the day. Indeed, the Romans might not have known what to make of him. His preaching could have been understood as belonging to one of the mystery religions. Technically, it was illegal to practice mystery religions, but so many soldiers followed them that they tended to be overlooked, as long as people worshiped the Roman gods as well as their own mystery religion.

Once the Romans figured out that Jesus and his followers were not members of a new mystery religion, it was easy to assign them to a branch of Judaism. Christians could be lumped in with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and



Christ Driving Out Them That Sold and Bought from the Temple
by James Tissot, ca. 1886–1894

Essenes. One could be a Jew in the Roman Empire, though one might have to pay a fee.

It was only after the death of Jesus, who was crucified on the order of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, probably in the year 30 BCE, that Christianity really began to spread. Even after the death of Jesus, the Christians initially formed only one of the many sects within the larger body of Judaism. They called themselves Christians, and they seemed to have been a little lost. There was no clear notion as to whom Jesus had directed his message: Was it the Jews or the Gentiles?

A Coherent Christian Tradition

The man who clarified these issues was Saul, a Jewish man from Tarsus. Saul converted to Christianity and took the name Paul. After he converted to Christianity, he became its principal architect, organized churches throughout the Roman world, and is by far the best known of its teachers. Acts of the Apostles is concerned primarily with his career. There are also letters as well. From the writings both by Paul and about him, the first coherent Christian theology was developed. Paul was the one who also began the mission of preaching to the Gentiles.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why is Herod's Temple called the Second Temple and not the Third Temple?
2. Why was Christianity such a revolutionary religion?

Suggested Reading

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. 2nd rev. ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

Other Books of Interest

Charlesworth, James H., ed. *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls.* New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Crossan, John D., Stephen J. Patterson, Marcus J. Borg, and Hershel Shanks. *The Search for Jesus: Modern Scholarship Looks at the Gospels.* Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1994.

Smallwood, E. Mary. *The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations.* Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001.

Websites to Visit

1. A website dedicated to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by architect Tuvia Sagiv of Tel Aviv provides a thorough study of the history of Temple Mount — www.templemount.org/index.html
2. PBS Web presentation: "The Roman Empire in the First Century: Jews in Roman Times" — www.pbs.org/empires/romans/life/life5b.html
3. *The Paul Page* website provides many articles, book reviews, and scholarly resources involved in the study of Saul (Paul) of Tarsus — www.thepaulpage.com

Lecture 12: Excursus: Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reader from the Biblical Archaeology Review.*

The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered by Bedouin boys in 1947. The scrolls were thought to be part of the library of the settlement of Qumran, located on the shores of the Dead Sea. They contain copies of almost all of the books of the Hebrew Bible.

The Caves at Qumran

The Dead Sea Scrolls refer to scrolls and fragments discovered in at least seven different sites on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. The most important of these are approximately eight hundred scrolls found in the caves around Qumran. The scrolls date roughly from 200 BCE to 70 CE. According to William F. Albright, the dean of biblical archaeology, the Qumran scrolls are the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times.



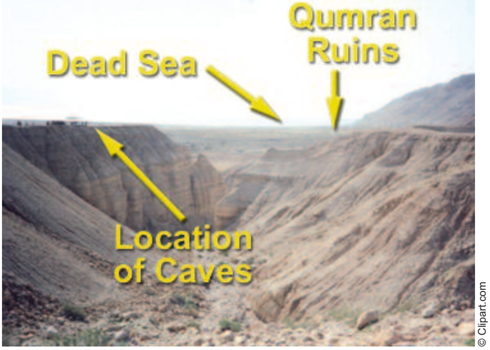
Background: © NASA; Cave and Jars: © The History Archives

A satellite view of the Dead Sea region inset with the original cave entrance and two of the jars in which some of the Dead Sea Scrolls were found near the ruins of Qumran.

The caves at Qumran are situated about a mile from the western shore of the Dead Sea, and about three miles from its northern end. Jerusalem is about thirteen miles to the west; Jericho is about nine miles to the north. This is the Judean wilderness, approximately thirteen hundred feet below sea level.

The ruins of Qumran are about a half mile to the south of the cave in which the first scrolls were found. At the time, back in

1947, there wasn't much visible of the ruins. But several eminent travelers in the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries had described the remains of Qumran. One even suggested that they were the biblical remains of Gomorrah, though this is not true.



Photograph showing the location of the original caves in relation to the ruins at Qumran and the Dead Sea

The ruins of Qumran were excavated in five original seasons, 1951 and then 1953 to 1956. The earliest period of occupation of Qumran was during the Israelite period, approximately the eighth century BCE. The final period of occupation, a brief one, was when the area was occupied by Roman soldiers sometime after the year 68 CE, after the community at Qumran was destroyed by the Tenth Legion in the year 68, during the First Jewish Revolt against Rome.

Most scholars would agree that Qumran was the home of the Essenes. Whether or not it was, it seems most likely that the Dead Sea Scrolls came from Qumran and represent the library of the settlement. They were most likely hidden by members of the community, who fled from the Romans in the year 68 CE, intending to return and retrieve their library. Unfortunately, they were probably all killed or sent off into exile. So their library remained in the caves in which they hid it, for nearly two thousand years.

Discovery of the Scrolls

The first Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered sometime during the winter of 1946 and 1947. Three cousins belonging to a Bedouin tribe were watering their flock of goats about two miles to the south of Qumran. One of the boys began exploring the hundreds of caves in the area, hoping to find hidden gold. Intrigued by the openings in the cliff face many feet above him, he threw a rock into the opening and heard something shatter. He decided to wait until the next morning and bring his two cousins with him, but the next morning, one of the cousins woke early and climbed up to the cave. He found the floor covered with broken pottery and saw ten jars stacked against the walls. Eight of the jars were empty, but from one of the others, he pulled out two bundles wrapped in linen and a leather scroll.

When he got back, the boys unrolled the bundles and found two more scrolls. These three scrolls, covered in a strange script, were taken back to their Bedouin camp and left to hang in a bag from a tent pole. Eventually, they went to Bethlehem and sold the scrolls to an antiquities dealer and leather maker known as Kando, who figured that if he couldn't sell the scrolls, he could make them into sandals using the leather.

The Bedouins eventually found four more scrolls and gave them to Kando. The very first scholar to see the scrolls was Eleazar L. Sukenik, who was a professor of archaeology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. During the last week in November in 1947, he received an urgent message from a friend

asking to meet him. When they met, the friend handed him a scrap of parchment. Sukenik realized that it was an ancient scroll, and he agreed to buy all the scrolls on behalf of Hebrew University. Sukenik went down to Bethlehem, bought the scrolls, and returned with them. A couple of hours after he got back to Jerusalem, the United Nations passed a resolution creating the state of Israel, and all contact was cut off with the Arab world for a number of months. So he made it back with the scrolls by scant hours.



This image shows the condition of one of the scrolls shortly after it was found. On the left is the heavily deteriorated side of the scroll, while the image on the right shows the less damaged side.

The Contents of the Scrolls

The first two scrolls were nonbiblical. One was called the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness, and the other was called the Thanksgiving Scroll. The third scroll was a copy of the Book of Isaiah. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest part of the Hebrew Bible was dated to the year 895 CE. This copy of the Book of Isaiah was dated to about 100 BCE, so it is nearly a thousand years earlier. The difference between the Dead Sea Scroll copy of the Book of Isaiah and the later copies is insignificant. There are only about thirteen little differences, which shows the care with which the text has been transmitted over the centuries.

Upon further research, it turned out that the so-called Thanksgiving Scroll was a copy of the prayer book of the community, and the so-called War Scroll describes a time when God and his angels will join the Sons of Light in wiping out the Sons of Darkness. This is one of the first descriptions of Armageddon.

No Sale

Two months after Sukenik bought the first three scrolls, he was shown four more scrolls and was asked if he wanted to buy them. The scrolls belonged to the head of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel. The archbishop had bought the four scrolls from the same dealer from whom Sukenik had bought them, reportedly for about fifty dollars. Sukenik looked at the four scrolls and said that they were genuine. He told the archbishop that he was willing to buy the four scrolls, and they agreed to meet a couple of days later, but the sale never took place.

That was the last that Sukenik saw of the scrolls. Months later, he received a message saying that the archbishop had decided not to sell the scrolls. Indeed, it turned out that Sukenik had only been called in to ascertain that the scrolls were genuine. The archbishop then tried to sell them in the United States for several million dollars, but he never found a taker at that high price.

Sukenik died early in 1953, never knowing that the additional four scrolls would end up back in Jerusalem and that he would know well the person responsible for retrieving them.

A Surprising Buyer

In 1954, a famous Israeli archaeologist named Yigael Yadin was in the United States lecturing in Baltimore and New York on his interpretation and explanation of the scrolls that Sukenik had bought. While chatting with William F. Albright at Johns Hopkins University, Yadin heard that Samuel had dropped his price for the four scrolls to half a million dollars and was advertising them in the classifieds section of the *Wall Street Journal.*


© Ted Spiegel/CORBIS

Professor Yigael Yadin (1917–1984) of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem at work in his study in 1968 deciphering the Temple Scroll

Yadin then bought the scrolls for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, through an intermediary. Most interesting, and what many don't realize, is that Yadin was the son of Eleazar L. Sukenik. He had taken an Israeli name, and he had managed to purchase the four scrolls that had eluded his father. He brought the scrolls back to Jerusalem, where they were reunited and placed in the Shrine of the Book.

What was in the four scrolls that Yadin had bought from Samuel? One was another copy of the Book of Isaiah, which was in better condition than Sukenik's. The other scrolls were the Manual of Discipline, the Genesis Apocryphon, which is a retelling of the story of Genesis from Noah to Abraham, and the Pesher, a commentary on Habakkuk.

The Copper Scroll

In one of the caves at Qumran were discovered two scrolls that caused great excitement, for they were both made of copper. When connected, they formed a single manuscript known as the Copper Scroll. The Copper Scroll was extremely difficult to unroll. Finally, in Manchester, England, it was sawn into separate pieces, flattened, and reattached so that it could be read (it was written in Hebrew).

The contents dealt with hidden treasures, specifically sixty-four different treasures and their locations. It has been speculated that this list refers to Temple treasures smuggled out of Jerusalem during the First Jewish Revolt, from 66 to 70 CE. But despite more than one expedition in search of this lost wealth, nothing has been found. It's now widely suspected that not only the hiding places, but also perhaps the treasures themselves, were made up.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the most likely explanation for how the Dead Sea Scrolls remained hidden in caves for nearly two thousand years?
2. What is significant about the War Scroll?

Suggested Reading

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reader from the Biblical Archaeology Review.* New York: Vintage, 1993.

Other Books of Interest

Abegg, Martin G., and Peter Flint. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English.* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.

Brown, Judith A. *John Marco Allegro: The Maverick of the Dead Sea Scrolls.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005.

Davies, Philip R., George J. Brooke, and Phillip R. Callaway. *The Complete World of the Dead Sea Scrolls.* London: Thames & Hudson, 2002.

Elledge, C.D. *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls.* Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005.

Magness, Jodi. *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.

Websites to Visit

1. PBS television show *Think Tank* website provides a transcript of a broadcast that aired April 17, 2003, entitled "What Do We Know About the Bible?"; the show featured Hershel Shanks of the *Biblical Archaeology Review* and Eric Meyers of Duke University — www.pbs.org/thinktank/show_1019.html
2. *Ibiblio* (the Public's Library and Digital Archive) website features an extensive portal entitled "Scrolls from the Dead Sea: The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Scholarship," which includes links to pertinent Library of Congress websites and other research organizations — www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit/intro.html
3. University of North Carolina at Charlotte website by Dr. James D. Tabor provides a short list of "Basic Facts Regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls" and a link to his "Jewish Roman World of Jesus" website — www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/jdtabor/dssfacts.html

Lecture 13: From the First Jewish Revolt and the Destruction of Jerusalem to Bar Kochba and the Second Jewish Rebellion

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Hershel Shanks's (ed.) *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (chapter 8: "Roman Domination: The Jewish Revolt").

The First and Second Jewish Revolts took place in the first and second centuries CE. Both ended as dramatic failures. The first resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple. The second rebellion resulted in the banishment of the Jews from Jerusalem for more than five hundred years.

The First Revolt

In 66 CE, the Jews rose up against the Romans. The uprising spread across Palestina and into Egypt and other areas of the Roman Empire. The Romans decided they could not allow this to continue and sent Roman troops to put down the rebellion in Palestina.

It actually took the Romans a while to attack Jerusalem, because in 67, 68, and even 69 CE, things were not going well in Rome. There were four Roman emperors in the year 69 alone, and the man who emerged victorious was none other than Vespasian, who had been sent to crush the Jewish revolt previously. Because he had become emperor and could not lead the army, he sent his son Titus to do the deed. So it was probably during the month of May in the year 70 that the battle for Jerusalem and the end of the First Jewish Revolt came to pass.



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Under Siege



Josephus says there were about twenty-three thousand fighting men in Jerusalem. The Roman historian Tacitus says that the number of every person in the city was six hundred thousand, which may have included the pilgrims who had come to celebrate Passover. The usual population was probably only about eighty thousand, so Josephus's number makes more sense.

The Romans attacked from the north, breaking through no fewer than three different walls. The Romans then put the city under siege. Josephus tells us that the famine became so severe that the children pulled the very morsels out of their fathers' mouths and the mothers did the same to their infants. It sounds very much like the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians.

By July, Titus had launched an assault on the Antonia Fortress that Herod had built. Titus captured it and ordered its demolition. Then came the Temple itself. Within a week of capturing the fortress, the Romans began to build siege embankments, and eventually brought up the battering rams. The gates of the Temple were set on fire, and then the Roman soldiers dashed in. After taking control of the outer courts, the defenders went in to the inner part of the Temple, where the sanctuary lay. Only a couple of days later, in the last days of August 70 CE, the Roman soldiers broke into the inner Temple.

Josephus says that the defenders were all killed. Eventually, the sanctuary and Temple were set on fire, accidentally, by an ordinary Roman soldier throwing a piece of burning wood into the Temple. Titus later claimed that he never meant to destroy the Temple, and that he had ordered his men to save it. But it was too late. The Temple was consumed by flames and for the second time in history, the holiest place of the Jews was destroyed by an invading force. It took place on August 28, 70 CE, the ninth of Ab, the same day that the Temple of Solomon had been destroyed more than 650 years earlier.

Booty from the Temple

In the Jewish quarter, at a place called the Burnt House, there was found the arm and hand of a twenty-year-old woman, who had died in 70 CE. It is not known what happened to the rest of her body; the arm and the hand are the only human remains left from the destruction of the city in 70 CE.

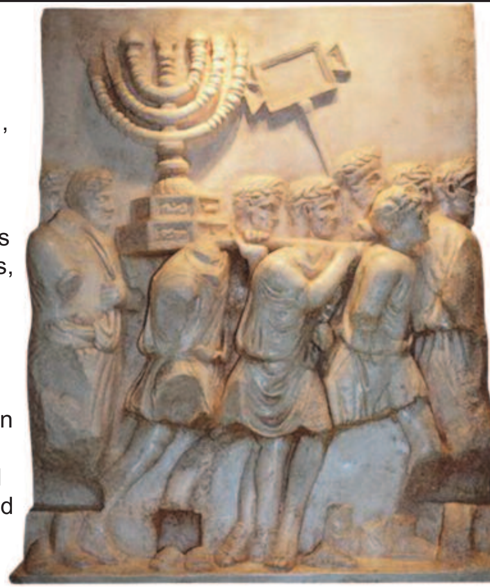
Most of the captives from Jerusalem were sent to work in mines or were killed in amphitheaters by gladiators. Indeed, so many people were sold as slaves that the price of slaves dropped by half. The Romans destroyed the rest of Jerusalem and left standing only three towers built by Herod.

In the meantime, upon Titus's return to Rome, he held a parade in which hundreds of Jewish prisoners were forced to march, and the booty from the campaign, including objects from the Temple, was displayed. To celebrate his victory, Titus built a Triumphal Arch at the eastern end of the Forum in Rome. Inside, he had carved a depiction of his soldiers carrying off the treasures from Herod's Temple.

The Second Jewish Rebellion

With the end of the First Jewish Rebellion, the Jews were subdued, but the Romans didn't leave. Instead, they built their headquarters in Jerusalem. Archaeologists have excavated remnants from this period, including inscriptions, coins, traces of an aqueduct, and roof tiles stamped with the logo of the Tenth Legion.

The Second Jewish Rebellion, known as the Bar Kochba Rebellion after its leader, started in the year 132 CE, and lasted four years until 135 CE. By this time, Josephus had died, but archaeology, the Roman historian Dio Cassius, the Church historian Father Eusebius, and Hadrian's biography provide a lot of information about this Second Jewish Rebellion.



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Jewish prisoners carrying the loot from the Temple are depicted in this relief copied from the triumphal arch of Titus and displayed in the Jerusalem Museum.

Hadrian visited Jerusalem as part of a grand tour of his empire. He announced that Jerusalem would be renamed, and henceforth would be called Aelia Capitolina, named for the emperor himself and the cult of Capitolia at Rome. This announcement was met with intense resentment, and rebellion soon broke out.

The uprising lasted for four years and was led by Bar Kochba, whom some regarded as the Messiah. His name meant Son of the Star, and he was one of the most effective leaders the Jews ever had. It took eighty thousand Romans to repress his revolt.

In the end, the rebellion was contained and Hadrian renamed Jerusalem Aelia Capitolina. He put up new streets, erected a temple to Jupiter, and expelled all remaining Jews from Jerusalem, forbidding them to ever live there again. The Jews could only go into Jerusalem once a year, on the ninth of Ab, and even for that they had to pay a price. But the city became a holy city to the Christians, and sometime after 200 CE, pilgrims began coming to Jerusalem. The city flourished with this new business.

The Diaspora

In the meantime, together the two failed Jewish rebellions against the Romans led to the Diaspora. Jews and Judaism were spread to the four corners of the earth, with reverberations that are still felt to this day.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the possible link between the Coliseum and the First Jewish Rebellion?
2. Who was the leader of the Second Jewish Rebellion?

Suggested Reading

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. 2nd rev. ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

Other Books of Interest

Applebaum, Shimon. *Prolegomena to the Study of the Second Jewish Revolt (A.D. 132–135).* Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1976.

Berlin, Andrea M., and J. Andrew Overman, eds. *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology.* London: Routledge, 2002.

Cline, Eric H. *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Furneaux, Rupert. *The Roman Siege of Jerusalem.* New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1972.

Yadin, Yigael. *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome.* New York: Random House, 1971.

Websites to Visit

1. MSNBC website provides an Associated Press report (with images) from March 13, 2006, entitled “Archaeologists Find Ancient Israeli Tunnels: Underground Chambers Built during Jewish Revolt against Romans” — www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11813638
2. BrainSip website features an overview of the First Jewish Revolt with links to related topics — great-jewish-revolt.brainsip.com
3. Washington State University website: *The Hebrews: The Diaspora* by Professor Richard Hooker — www.wsu.edu/~dee/HEBREWS/DIASPORA.HTM

Lecture 14: Excursus: Masada, What Really Happened?

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Yigael Yadin's *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand.*

Masada is perhaps the most spectacular site in Israel. Located just south of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scroll caves, it is a great rock rising up out of the Judean desert, moored to the western cliffs of the Dead Sea. It was excavated between 1963 and 1965.

Up the Snake Path

Prior to the archaeological excavations of the 1960s, all of our information about Masada came from Josephus, the Jewish general turned Roman historian. Most details are from his book *The Jewish War*, in which he says, "There was a rock, not small in circumference, and very high. It was encompassed by valleys of such vast depth downward that the eye could not reach their bottoms. They were abrupt and such as no animal could walk upon, excepting two places on the rock where it subsides, affording a passage of



The ruins of the fortress of Masada

ascent, though not without difficulty. Now of the ways that lead to it, one is from Lake Asphaltitus toward the sun rising and the other on the west, where the ascent is easier. The one of these ways is called the Serpent, as resembling that animal in its narrowness and its perpetual windings." This path is now called the Snake Path, and many tourists walk up it today.

The Great Siege Ramp

Masada was first fortified during the Hellenistic period, and was used by Herod the Great in the year 40 BCE, when he left his fiancée and eight hundred soldiers at Masada as he fled across the desert to Rome. When he came back, he realized Masada would be a great place to escape to and so continued to fortify the site, though he never had to use it. In the end, Masada contained an elaborate set of buildings that Herod had ordered constructed, including two palaces.

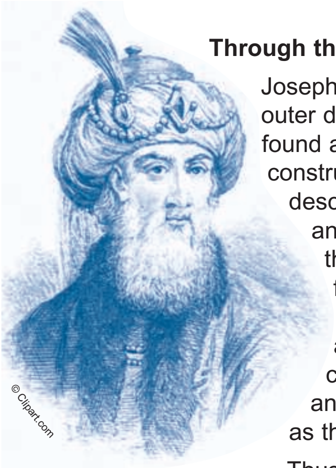
At the beginning of the First Jewish Rebellion, in the year 66 CE, rebels took over Masada. They didn't take much part in the war after that. Masada didn't pose any threat to the Romans, and even after Jerusalem fell, Masada held out. The Romans ignored it until the winter of 73. Then the Roman general Flavius Silva moved against it.

Flavius Silva set up a ring of camps surrounding Masada. There were eight fortified camps, all linked by a wall, as dictated by the Roman military textbook. To reach the top, he built a huge ramp that rose 450 feet above the desert floor. Having built the ramp, he then brought up Roman siege engines and began the assault of Masada. The siege ramp built by the Romans is still in place today.



© Nathan Benn/CORBIS

The remains of the great siege ramp built by the Romans at Masada



Flavius Josephus
(37–100 CE)

Through the Wall

Josephus says that when the Romans battered down the outer defensive wall surrounding the top of Masada, they found a new wall inside which the defenders had quickly constructed. This was a wooden wall that Josephus describes as follows. "It was made soft and yielding and so was capable of avoiding the terrible blows that affected the outer wall. It was framed after the following manner. They laid together great beams of wood lengthwise, one close to the end of another, and the same way in which they were cut. There were two of these rows parallel to one another and laid at such a distance from each other as the breadth of the wall required."

Thus, earth was put into the space between those walls, so there were two sets of wood, with earth in between the wood. As the battering ram hit the outer wall, the inner, softer wall absorbed the impact. Thus, it took much longer than the Romans expected to knock a hole in the outer wall. Once they put a hole in it, they found themselves facing that first stack of wood, which had defenders on top of it shooting down at them. The Romans did as one might expect. They tossed burning arrows and torches inside, and the wall quickly blazed up in flames. The defenders had one moment of hope when the wind changed direction and blew the flames against the Roman towers, but the wind changed again, and the wall burned down.

By Their Own Hands

When the Romans broke through the outer wall, night was falling. The Romans, we are told, returned to their camp with joy and resolved to set the attack the next day. On top of Masada, the Jews realized that everything was lost. Josephus tells us that they chose ten men by lots to dispatch the rest, and when those ten had killed all of the other men, one of the ten killed the others and then killed himself. When the Romans came in the next morning, they found no one alive. All nine hundred sixty of the Jewish defenders of Masada were dead.

Uncertain Historicity

How did Josephus know this story? He claimed that two old women and five children had concealed themselves in caverns underground, emerged the next morning, and told the Romans the story. Ever since then, the story of Masada has been told and retold.

The problem is that the historicity of this basic plot is completely uncertain. The general facts are accurate and confirmed by archaeology. The ramp is still there. Fragments from the camps are still there. But Josephus was not at Masada, so it is not a firsthand account. He did have access to the official field reports, and he may even have consulted Flavius Silva, so he is reliable on some instances. But the secondhand nature of his knowledge is evident upon a close examination of the details.

What actually happened up on top of Masada? We will probably never know for certain, but most likely while some of the Jews killed themselves and their families, the majority were killed by the Romans. In other words, it was more of a massacre than a suicide.

The thinking is that Josephus may have invented the story in part to lay the blame on the Jews themselves, to take the burden of the massacre off the hands of the Romans, and to turn the massacre into a suicide for which the Romans were not responsible. Here again, there is much debate today. A number of scholars have reinvestigated Masada, and the Israeli army has ceased to swear in new soldiers on top of Masada. Indeed, the entire notion of the suicide has been called into question. It's now being referred to as the myth of Masada, though there are those who still hold that it was a mass suicide.



The men of Masada are shown murdering their wives and children to prevent their falling into the hands of the Romans in this illustration from the frontispiece engraved for the American edition of Maynard's *Josephus,* 1790.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How did the Romans go about their siege of Masada?
2. What is meant by the "myth of Masada"?

Suggested Reading

Yadin, Yigael. *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*. New York: Random House, 1998.

Other Books of Interest

Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

———. *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada.* Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002.

Cline, Eric H. *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Josephus, Flavius. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged.* Trans. William Whiston. New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1980.

Websites to Visit

1. PBS website *From Jesus to Christ* provides an article entitled "The Credibility of Josephus" by historian Shaye Cohen, who compares Josephus's account with recent archaeological evidence — www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/masada.html
2. University of North Carolina at Charlotte website by Dr. James D. Tabor provides an article entitled "Masada: Cave 2001/2002" from his *Jewish Roman World of Jesus* website — www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/jdtabor/masada.html
3. *Archaeology* magazine (a publication of the Archaeological Institute of America) provides several articles on Masada — www.archaeology.org/cgi-bin/perlfect/search/search.pl?mode=all&q=masada

Suggested Readings for This Course:

Finkelstein, Israel, and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.

Miller, J. Maxwell, and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986.

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Yadin, Yigael. *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*. New York: Random House, 1998.

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